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LIMBO AND OTHER ESSAYS



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# LIMBO AND OTHER ESSAYS

TO WHICH IS NOW ADDED  
ARIADNE IN MANTUA

BY

VERNON LEE *psued*

*Violet Paget*



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# LIMBO







## LIMBO

Perocchè gente di molto valore  
Conobbi che in quel *Limbo* eran sospesi.

### I

It may seem curious to begin with Dante and pass on to the Children's Rabbits' House ; but I require both to explain what it is I mean by Limbo ; no such easy matter on trying. For this discourse is not about the Pious Pagans whom the poet found in honourable confinement at the Gate of Hell, nor of their neighbours the Unchristened Babies ; but I am glad of Dante's authority for the existence of a place holding such creatures as have just missed a necessary rite, or come too soon for thorough salvation. And I am glad, moreover, that the poet has insisted on the importance—"gente di molto valore"—of the beings thus enclosed ; because it is just with the superior quality of the things in what

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## Limbo

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I mean by Limbo that we are peculiarly concerned.

And now for the other half of my preliminary illustration of the subject, to wit, the Children's Rabbits' House. The little gardens which the children played at cultivating have long since disappeared, taken insensibly back into that corner of the formal but slackly kept garden which looks towards the steep hill dotted with cows and sheep. But in that corner, behind the shapeless Portugal laurels and the patches of seeding grass, there still remains, beneath big trees, what the children used to call the "Rabbits' Villa." 'Tis merely a wooden toy house, with green moss-eaten roof, standing, like the lake dwellings of prehistoric times, on wooden posts, with the tall foxgloves, crimson and white, growing all round it. There is something ludicrous in this superannuated toy, this Noah's ark on stilts among the grass and bushes ; but when you look into the thing, finding the empty plates and cups "for having tea with the rabbits," and when you look into it spiritually also, it grows oddly pathetic. We walked up and down between the high hornbeam hedges,

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## Limbo

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the sunlight lying low on the armies of tall daisies and seeding grasses, and falling in narrow glints among the white boles and hanging boughs of the beeches, where the wooden benches stand unused in the deep grass, and the old swing hangs crazily crooked. Yes, the Rabbits' Villa and the surrounding overgrown beds are quite pathetic. Is it because they are, in a way, the graves of children long dead, as dead—despite the grown-up folk who may come and say "It was I"—as the rabbits and guinea-pigs with whom they once had tea? That is it; and that explains my meaning: the Rabbits' Villa is, to the eye of the initiate, one of many little branch [establishments of Limbo] surrounding us on all sides. Another poet, more versed in similar matters than Dante (one feels sure that Dante knew his own mind, and always had his own way, even when exiled), Rossetti, in a sonnet, has given us the terrible little speech which would issue from the small Limbos of this kind:

Look in my face: My name is *Might-have-been*.

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# Limbo

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## II

Of all the things that Limbo might contain, there is one about which some persons, very notably Churchyard Gray, have led us into error. I do not believe there is much genius to be found in Limbo. The world, although it takes a lot of dunning, offers a fair price for this article, which it requires as much as water-power and coal, nay even as much as food and clothes (bread for its soul and raiment for its thought) ; so that what genius there is will surely be brought into market. But even were it wholly otherwise, genius, like murder, *would out* ; for genius is one of the liveliest forces of nature ; not to be quelled or quenched, adaptable, protean, expansive, nay explosive ; of all things in the world the most able to take care of itself ; which accounts for so much public expenditure to foster and encourage it : foster the sun's chemistry, the force of gravitation, encourage atomic affinity and natural selection, magnificent Mæcenas and judicious Parliamentary Board, they are sure to do you credit !

Hence, to my mind, there are *no mute in-*

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## Limbo

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*glorious Miltons*, or none worth taking into account. Our sentimental surmises about them grow from the notion that human power is something like the wheels or cylinder of a watch, a neat numbered scrap of mechanism, stamped at a blow by a creative *fiat*, or hand-hammered by evolution, and fitting just exactly into one little plan, serving exactly one little purpose, indispensable for that particular machine, and otherwise fit for the dust-heap. Happily for us, it is certainly not so. The very greatest men have always been the most versatile: Lionardo, Goethe, Napoleon; the next greatest can still be imagined under different circumstances as turning their energy to very different tasks; and I am tempted to think that the hobbies by which many of them have laid much store, while the world merely laughed at the statesman's trashy verses or the musician's third-rate sketches, may have been of the nature of rudimentary organs, which, given a different environment, might have developed, become the creature's chief *raison d'être*, leaving that which has actually chanced to be his talent to become atrophied, perhaps invisible.



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## Limbo

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Be this last as it may—and I commend it to those who believe in genius as a form of monomania—it is quite certain that genius has nothing in common with machinery. It is the most organic and alive of living organisms ; the most adaptable therefore, and least easily killed ; and for this reason, and despite Gray's *Elegy*, there is no chance of much of it in Limbo.

This is no excuse for the optimistic extermination of distinguished men. It is indeed most difficult to kill genius, but there are a hundred ways of killing its possessors ; and with them as much of their work as they have left undone. What pictures might Giorgione not have painted but for the lady, the rival, or the plague, whichever it was that killed him ! Mozart could assuredly have given us a half-dozen more *Don Giovannis* if he had had fewer lessons, fewer worries, better food ; nay, by his miserable death the world has lost, methinks, more even than that—a commanding influence which would have kept music, for a score of years, earnest and masterly but joyful : Rossini would not have run to seed, and Beethoven's ninth symphony might have been a genuine " Hymn to Joy " if only Mozart, the

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## Limbo

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Apollo of musicians, had, for a few years more, flooded men's souls with radiance. A similar thing is said of Rafael ; but his followers were mediocre, and he himself lacked personality, so that many a better example might be brought.

These are not useless speculations ; it is as well we realise that, although genius be immortal, poor men of genius are not. Quite an extraordinary small amount of draughts and microbes, of starvation bodily and spiritual, of pin-pricks of various kinds, will do for them ; we can all have a hand in their killing ; the killing also of their peace, kindness, and justice, sending these qualities to Limbo, which is full of such. And now, dear reader, I perceive that we have at last got Limbo well in sight and, in another minute, we may begin to discern some of its real contents.

### III

The Paladin Astolfo, as Ariosto relates, was sent on a winged horse up to the moon ; where, under the [ciceroneship] of John the Evangelist, he saw most of the things which had been

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## Limbo

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lost on earth, among others the wits of many persons in bottles, his cousin Orlando's which he had come on purpose to fetch, and, curiously enough, his own, which he had never missed.

The moon does well as storehouse for such brilliant, romantic things. The Limbo whose contents and branches I would speak of is far less glorious, a trifle humdrum ; sometimes such as makes one smile, like that Villa of the Rabbits in the neglected garden. 'Twas for this reason, indeed, that I preferred to clear away at once the question of the Mute Inglorious Miltons, and of such solemn public loss as comes of the untimely death of illustrious men. Do you remember, by the way, reader, a certain hasty sketch by Cazin, which hangs in a corner of the Luxembourg ? The bedroom of Gambetta after his death : the white bed neatly made, empty, with laurel garlands replacing him ; the tricolor flag, half-furled, leaned against the chair, and on the table vague heaped-up papers ; a thing quite modest and heroic, suitable to all similar occasions—Mirabeau say, and Stevenson on his far-off island—and with whose image we can fitly close our talk of genius wasted by early death.



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## Limbo

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I have alluded to *happiness* as filling up much space in Limbo ; and I think that the amount of it lying in that kingdom of Might-have-been is probably out of all proportion with that which must do that duty in this actual life. Browning's *Last Ride Together*—one has to be perpetually referring to poets on this matter, for philosophers and moralists consider happiness in its *causal connection* or as a fine snare to virtue—Browning's *Last Ride Together* expresses, indeed, a view of the subject commending itself to active and cheerful persons, which comes to many just after their salad days ; to wit, what a mercy that we don't often get what we want most. The objects of our recent ardent longings reveal themselves, most luridly sometimes, as dangers, deadlocks, fetters, hopeless labyrinths, from which we have barely escaped. This is the house I wanted to buy, the employment I fretted to obtain, the lady I pined to marry, the friend with whom I projected to share lodgings. With such sudden chill recognitions comes belief in a special providence, some fine Greek-sounding goddess, thwarting one's dearest wishes from tender solicitude that we

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## Limbo

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shouldn't get what we want. In such a crisis the nobler of us feel like the Riding Lover, and learn ideal philosophy and manly acquiescence ; the meaner snigger ungenerously about those youthful escapes ; and know not that they have gained safety at the price, very often, of the little good—ideality, faith and dash—there ever was about them : safe, smug individuals, whose safety is mere loss to the cosmos. But later on, when our characters have settled, when repeated changes have taught us which is our unchangeable ego, we begin to let go that optimist creed, and to suspect (suspicion turning to certainty) that, as all things which *have* happened to us have not been always advantageous, so likewise things longed for in vain need not necessarily have been curses. As we grow less attached to theories, and more to our neighbours, we recognise every day that loss, refusal of the desired, has not by any means always braced or chastened the lives we look into ; we admit that the Powers That Be showed considerable judgment in disregarding the teachings of asceticism, and inspiring mankind with innate repugnance to having a bad time. And, to

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## Limbo

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return to the question of Limbo, as we watch the best powers, the whole usefulness and sweetness starved out of certain lives for lack of the love, the liberty, or the special activities they prayed for ; as regards the question of Limbo, I repeat, we grow (or try to grow) a little more cautious about sending so much more happiness—ours and other folk's—to the place of Might-have-been.

Some of it certainly does seem beyond our control, a fatal matter of constitution. I am not speaking of the results of vice or stupidity ; this talk of Limbo is exclusively addressed to the very nicest people.

A deal of the world's sound happiness is lost through Shyness. We have all of us seen instances. They often occur between members of the same family, the very similarity of nature, which might make mothers and daughters, brothers and sisters, into closest companions, merely doubling the dose of that terrible reserve, timidity, horror of human contact, paralysis of speech, which keeps the most loving hearts asunder. It is useless to console ourselves by saying that each has its own love of the other. And thus



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## Limbo

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they walk, sometimes side by side, never looking in one another's eyes, never saying the word, till death steps in, death sometimes unable to loosen the tongue of the mourner.

Such things are common among our reserved northern races, making us so much less happy and less helpful in everyday life than our Latin and Teuton neighbours ; and, I imagine, are commonest among persons of the same blood. But the same will happen between lovers, or those who should have been such ; doubt of one's own feeling, fear of the other's charity, apprehension of its all being a mistake, has silently prevented many a marriage. The two, then, could not have been much in love ? Not *in love*, since neither ever allowed that to happen, more's the pity ; but loving one another with the whole affinity of their natures, and, after all, *being in love* is but the crisis, or the beginning of that, if it's worth anything.

Thus shyness sends much happiness to Limbo. But actual shyness is not the worst. Some persons, sometimes of the very finest kind, endowed for loving-kindness, passion, highest devotion, nay requiring it as much as air or

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## Limbo

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warmth, have received, from some baleful fairy, a sterilising gift of fear. Fear of what they could not tell; something which makes all community of soul a terror, and every friend a threat. Something terrible, in whose presence we must bow our heads and pray impunity therefrom for ourselves and ours.

But the bulk of happiness stacked up in Limbo appears, on careful looking, to be an agglomeration of other lost things; justice, charm, appreciation, and faith in one another, all recklessly packed off as so much lumber, sometimes to make room for fine new qualities instead! Justice, I am inclined to think, is usually sent to Limbo through the agency of others. A work in many folios might be written by condensing what famous men have had said against them in their days of struggle, and what they have answered about others in their days of prosperity.

The loss of *charm* is due to many more circumstances; the stress of life indeed seems calculated to send it to Limbo. Certain it is that few women, and fewer men, of forty, preserve a particle of it. I am not speaking of youth or beauty, though it does seem a pity



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## Limbo

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that mature human beings should mostly be too fat or too thin, and lacking either sympathy or intellectual keenness. *Charm* must comprise all that, but much besides. It is the undefinable quality of nearly every child, and of all nice lads and girls; the quality which (though it *can* reach perfection in exceptional old people) usually vanishes, no one knows when exactly, into the Limbo marked by the Rabbits' Villa, with its plates and tea-cups, mouldering on its wooden posts in the unweeded garden.

More useful qualities replace all these: hardness, readiness to snatch opportunity, mistrust of all ideals, inflexible self-righteousness; useful, nay necessary; but, let us admit it, in a life which, judged by the amount of dignity and sweetness it contains, is perhaps scarce necessary itself, and certainly not useful. The case might be summed up, for our guidance, by saying that the loss of many of our finer qualities is due to the complacent, and sometimes dutiful, cultivation of our worse ones!

For, even in the list of virtues, there are finer and less fine, nay virtues one might almost call atrocious, and virtues with a taint

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of ignominy. I have said that we lose some of our finer qualities this way ; what's worse is, that we often fail to appreciate the finest qualities of others.

### IV

And here, coming to the vague rubric *appreciation of others*, I feel we have got to a district of Limbo about which few of us should have the audacity to speak, and few, as a fact, have the courage honestly to think. *What do we make of our idea of others* in our constant attempt to justify ourselves ? No Japanese bogie-monger ever produced the equal of certain wooden monster-puppets which we carve, paint, rig out, and christen by the names of real folk—alas, alas, dear names sometimes of friends !—and stick up to gibber in our memory ; while the real image, the creature we have really known, is carted off to Limbo ! But this is too bad to speak of.

Let us rather think gently of things, sad, but sad without ignominy, of friendships still-born or untimely cut off, hurried by death into a place like that which holds the souls of the

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## Limbo

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unchristened babies ; often, like them, let us hope, removed to a sphere where such things grow finer and more fruitful, the sphere of the love of those we have not loved enough in life.

But that at best is but a place of ghosts ; so let us never forget, dear friends, how close all round lies Limbo, the Kingdom of Might-have-been.



IN PRAISE OF OLD HOUSES



## IN PRAISE OF OLD HOUSES

### I

My Yorkshire friend was saying that she hated being in an old house. *There seemed to be other* people in it besides the living . . .

These words, expressing the very reverse of what I feel, have set me musing on my foolish passion for the Past. The Past, but the real one; not the Past considered as a possible Present. For though I should like to have seen ancient Athens, or Carthage according to Salambô, and though I have pined to hear the singers of last century, I know that any other period than this of the world's history would be detestable to live in. For one thing—one among other instances of brutish dulness—our ancestors knew nothing of the emotion of the past, the rapture of old towns and houses.

This emotion, at times this rapture, depends

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## In Praise of Old Houses

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upon a number of mingled causes ; its origin is complex and subtle, like that of all things exquisite ; the flavour of certain dishes, the feel of sea or mountain air, in which chemical peculiarities and circumstances of temperature join with a hundred trifles, seaweed, herbs, tar, heather and so forth ; and like, more particularly, music and poetry, whose essence is so difficult of ascertaining. And in this case, the causes that first occur to our mind merely suggest a number more. Of these there is a principal one, only just less important than that suggested by my Yorkshire friend, which might be summed up thus : *That the action of time makes man's works into natural objects.*

Now, with no disrespect to man, 'tis certain Nature can do more than he. Not that she is the more intelligent of the two ; on the contrary, she often makes the grossest artistic blunders, and has, for instance, a woeful lack of design in England, and a perfect mania for obvious composition and deliberate picturesqueness in Italy and Argyllshire. But Nature is greater than man because she is bigger, and can do more things at a time. Man seems unable

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## In Praise of Old Houses

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to attend to one point without neglecting some other ; where he has a fine fancy in melody, his harmony is apt to be threadbare ; if he succeeds with colour, he cannot manage line, and if light and shade, then neither ; and it is a circumstance worthy of remark that whenever and wherever man has built beautiful temples, churches, and palaces, he has been impelled to bedizen them with primary colours, of which, in Venice and the Alhambra, time at last made something agreeable, and time also, in Greece, has judged best to obliterate every odious trace. Hence, in the works of man there is always a tendency to simplify, to suppress detail, to make things clear and explain patterns and points of view ; to save trouble, thought, and material ; to be symmetrical, which means, after all, to repeat the same thing twice over ; he knows it is wrong to carve one frieze on the top of the other, and to paint in more than one layer of paint. Of all such restrictions Nature is superbly unconscious. She smears weather-stain on weather-stain and lichen on lichen, never stopping to match them. She jags off corners and edges, and of one meagre line makes fifty curves and facets.

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She weaves pattern over pattern, regardless of confusion, so that the mangiest hedgerow is richer, more subtle than all the carpets and papers ever designed by Mr. Morris. Her one notion is *More, always more* ; whereas that of man, less likely to exceed, is a timid *Enough*. No wonder, for has she not the chemistry of soil and sun and moisture and wind and frost, all at her beck and call ?

Be it as it may, Nature does more for us than man, in the way of pleasure and interest. And to say, therefore, that time turns the works of man into natural objects is, therefore, saying that time gives them infinitely more variety and charm. In making them natural objects also time gives to man's lifeless productions the chief quality of everything belonging to Nature—life. Compare a freshly plastered wall with one that has been exposed to sun and rain, or a newly slated roof to one all covered with crumbling, grey, feathery stuff, like those of the Genoese villages, which look as if they had been thatched with olive-leaves from off their hills. 'Tis the comparison between life and death ; or, rather, since death includes change, between something and

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## In Praise of Old Houses

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nothing. Imagine a tree as regular as a column, or an apple as round as a door-knob !

### II

So much for the material improvements which time effects in our surroundings. We now come to the spiritual advantages of dealing with the past instead of the present.

These begin in our earliest boy- or girl-hood. What right-minded child of ten or twelve cares, beyond its tribute of apples, and jam, and cricket, and guinea-pigs, for so dull a thing as the present ? Why, the present is like this schoolroom or playground, compared with Polar Seas, Rocky Mountains, or Pacific Islands ; a place for the body, not for the soul. It all came back to me, a little while ago, when doing up for my young friend, L. V., sundry Roman coins long mislaid in a trunk, and which had formed my happiness at his age. Delightful things !—smooth and bright green like certain cabbage-leaves, or of a sorry brown, rough with rust and verdigris ; but all leaving alike a perceptible portion of themselves in the paper bag, a delectable smell of copper on one's



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hands. How often had I turned you round and round betwixt finger and thumb, trying to catch the slant of an inscription, or to get, in some special light, the film of effaced effigy—the chin of Nero, or the undulating, benevolent nose of Marcus Aurelius? How often have my hands not anointed you with every conceivable mixture of oil, varnish, and gum, rubbing you gently with silk and wool, and kid gloves, in hopes that something ineffable might rise up on your surface! I quite sympathised with my young friend when, having waggled and chortled over each of them several times, he thought it necessary to overcome the natural manly horror for kissing, and shook my hand twice, thrice, and then once more, returning from the door. . . . For had they not concentrated in their interesting verdigrised, brass-smelling smallness something, to me, of the glory and wonder of Rome? Cæcilia Metella, the Grotto of Egeria—a vague vision, through some twenty years' fog, of a drive between budding hedges and dry reeds; a walk across short anemone-starred turf; but turning into distinct remembrance of the buying of two old pennies, one of



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Augustus, the other even more interesting, owing to entire obliteration of both reverse and obverse ; a valuable coin, undoubtedly. And the Baths of Caracalla, which I can recollect with the thick brushwood, oak scrub, ivy and lentisk, and even baby ilexes, covering the masonry and overhanging the arches, and with rose hedges just cut away to dig out some huge porphyry pillar—were not their charms all concentrated in dim, delicious hopes of finding, just where the green turf ended and the undulating expanse of purple, green and white tessellated pavement began, some other brazen penny ? And then, in Switzerland, soon after, did I not suffer acutely, as I cleaned my coins, from the knowledge that in this barbarous Northern place, which the Romans had, perhaps, never come near, it was quite useless to keep one's eyes on the ruts of roads and the gravel of paths, and consequently almost useless to go out, or to exist ; until one day I learnt that a certain old lawyer, in a certain field, had actually dug up Roman antiquities. . . . I don't know whether I ever saw them with corporeal eyes, but certainly with those of the spirit ; and I was lent a

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## In Praise of Old Houses

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drawing of one of them, a gold armlet, of which I insisted on having a copy made, and sticking it up in my room. . . .

It does but little honour to our greatest living philosopher that he, whom children will bless for free permission to bruise, burn, and cut their bodies, and empty the sugar-bowl and jam-pot, should wish to deprive the coming generation of all historical knowledge, of so much joy therefore, and, let me add, of so much education. For do not tell me that it is not education, and of the best, to enable a child to feel the passion and poetry of life ; to live, while it trudges along the dull familiar streets, in company with dull, familiar, and often stolidly incurious grown-up folk, in that terrible, magnificent past, in dungeons and palaces, loving and worshipping Joan of Arc, execrating Bloody Mary, dreaming strange impossible possibilities of what we would have said and done for Marie Antoinette—said to her, *her* actually coming towards us, by some stroke of magic, in that advancing carriage ! There is enough in afterlife, God knows, to teach us *not to be heroic* ; 'tis just as well that, as children, we learn a lingering liking for the quality ; 'tis

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as important, perhaps, as learning that our tissues consume carbon, if they do so. I can speak very fervently of the enormous value for happiness of such an historical habit of mind.

Such a habit transcends altogether, in its power of filling one's life, the merely artistic and literary habit. For, after all, painting, architecture, music, poetry, are things which touch us in a very intermittent way. I would compare this historic habit rather to the capacity of deriving pleasure from nature, not merely through the eye, but through all the senses; and largely, doubtless, through those obscure perceptions which make certain kinds of weather, air, &c., an actual tonic, nay food, for the body. To this alone would I place my *historical habit* in the second rank. For, as the sensitiveness to nature means supplementing our physical life by the life of the air and the sun, the clouds and waters, so does this historic habit mean supplementing our present life by a life in the past; a life larger, richer than our own, multiplying our emotions by those of the dead. . . .

I am no longer speaking of our passions for Joan of Arc and Marie Antoinette, which

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disappear with our childhood; I am speaking of a peculiar sense, ineffable, indescribable, but which every one knows again who has once had it, and which to many of us has grown into a cherished habit—the sense of being companioned by the past, of being in a place warmed for our living by the lives of others. To me, as I started with saying, the reverse of this is almost painful; and I know few things more odious than the chilly, draughty emptiness of a place without a history. For this reason America, save what may remain of Hawthorne's New England and Irving's New York, never tempts my vagabond fancy. Nature can scarcely afford beauty wherewith to compensate for living in block-tin shanties or brand new palaces. How different if we find ourselves in some city, nay village, rendered habitable for our soul by the previous dwelling therein of others, of souls! Here the streets are never empty; and, surrounded by that faceless crowd of ghosts, one feels a right to walk about, being invited by them, instead of rushing along on one's errands among a throng of other wretched living creatures who are blocked by us and block us in their turn.

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How convey this sense ? I do not mean that if I walk through old Paris or through Rome my thoughts revolve on Louis XI. or Julius Cæsar. Nothing could be further from the fact. Indeed the charm of the thing is that one feels oneself accompanied not by this or that magnifico of the past (whom of course one would never have been introduced to), but by a crowd of nameless creatures ; the daily life, common joy, suffering, heroism of the past. Nay, there is something more subtle than this : the whole place (how shall I explain it ?) becomes a sort of living something. Thus, when I hurry (for one must needs hurry through Venetian narrowness) between the pink and lilac houses, with faded shutters and here and there a shred of tracery ; now turning a sharp corner before the locksmith's or the chestnut-roaster's ; now hearing my steps lonely between high walls broken by a Gothic doorway ; now crossing some smooth-paved little square with its sculptured well and balconied palaces, I feel, I say, walking day after day through these streets, that I am in contact with a whole living, breathing thing, full of habits of life, of suppressed words ; a sort of odd, mysterious,



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mythical, but very real creature ; as if, in the dark, I stretched out my hand and met something (but without any fear), something absolutely indefinable in shape and kind, but warm, alive. This changes solitude in unknown places into the reverse of solitude and strangeness. I remember walking thus along the bastions under the bishop's palace at Laon, the great stone cows peering down from the belfry above, with a sense of inexpressible familiarity and peace. And, strange to say, this historic habit makes us familiar also with places where we have never been. How well, for instance, do I not know Dinant and Bouvines, rival cities on the Meuse (topography and detail equally fantastic) ; and how I sometimes long, as with homesickness, for a scramble among the stones and grass and chandelier-like asphodels of Agrigentum, Veii, Collatium ! Why, to one minded like myself, a map, and even the names of stations in a time-table, are full of possible delight.

And sometimes it rises to rapture. This time, eight years ago, I was fretting my soul away, ill, exiled away from home, forbidden all work, in the south of Spain. At Granada for

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three dreary weeks it rained without ceasing, till the hill of the Alhambra became filled with the babbling of streams, and the town was almost cut off by a sea of mud. Between the showers one rushed up into the damp gardens of the Generalife, or into the Alhambra, to be imprisoned for hours in its desolate halls, while the rain splashed down into the courts. My sitting-room had five doors, four of glass ; and the snow lay thick on the mountains. My few books had been read long ago ; there remained to spell through a Spanish tome on the rebellion of the Alpujarras, whose Moorish leader, having committed every crime, finally went to heaven for spitting on the Koran on his death-bed. Letters from home were perpetually lost, or took a week to come. It seemed as if the world had quite unlearned every single trick that had ever given me pleasure. Yet, in these dreary weeks, there was one happy morning.

It was the anniversary, worse luck to it, of the Conquest of Granada from the Moors. We got seats in the chapel of the Catholic kings, and watched a gentleman in a high hat (which he kept on in church) and swallow tails, carry



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the banner of Castile and Aragon, in the presence of the archbishop and chapter, some mediæval pages, two trumpeters with pigtails, and an array of soldiers. A paltry ceremony enough. But before it began, and while mass was still going on, there came to me for a few brief moments that happiness unknown for so many, many months, that beloved historic emotion.

My eyes were wandering round the chapel, up the sheaves of the pilasters to the gilded spandrils, round the altars covered with gibbering sculpture, and down again among the crowd kneeling on the matted floor—women in veils, men with scarlet cloak-lining over the shoulder, here and there the shaven head and pigtail of the bull-ring. In the middle of it all, on their marble beds, lay the effigies of Ferdinand and Isabella, with folded hands and rigid feet, four crimson banners of the Moors overhead. The crowd was pouring in from the cathedral, and be vies of priests, and scarlet choir-boys led by their fiddler. The organ, above the chants, was running through vague mazes. I felt it approaching and stealing over me, that curious emotion felt before in such

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## In Praise of Old Houses

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different places : walking up and down, one day, in the church of Lamballe in Brittany ; seated, another time, in the porch at Ely. And then it possessed me completely, raising one into a sort of beatitude. This kind of rapture is not easy to describe. No rare feeling is. But I would warn you from thinking that in such solemn moments there sweeps across the brain a paltry pageant, a Lord Mayor's Show of bygone things, like the cavalcades of future heroes who descend from frescoed or sculptured wall at the bidding of Ariosto's wizards and Spenser's fairies. This is something infinitely more potent and subtle ; and like all strong intellectual emotions, it is compounded of many and various elements, and has its origin far down in mysterious depths of our nature ; and it arises overwhelmingly from many springs, filling us with the throb of vague passions welling from our most vital parts. There is in it no possession of any definite portion of bygone times ; but a yearning expectancy, a sense of the near presence, as it were, of the past ; or, rather, of a sudden capacity in ourselves of apprehending the past which looms all round.

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For a few moments thus, in that chapel before the tombs of the Catholic kings ; in the churches of Bruges and Innsbruck at the same time (for such emotion gives strange possibilities of simultaneous presence in various places) ; with the gold pomegranate flower of the badges, and the crimson tassels of the Moorish standards before my eyes ; also the iron knights who watch round Maximilian's grave—for a moment while the priests were chanting and the organs quavering, the life of to-day seemed to reel and vanish, and my mind to be swept along the dark and gleaming whirlpools of the past. ....

### III

Catholic kings, Moorish banners, wrought-iron statues of paladins ; these are great things, and not at all what I had intended to speak of when I set out to explain why old houses, which give my Yorkshire friend the creeps, seem to my feelings so far more peaceful and familiar.

Yes, it is just because the past is somehow more companionable, warmer, more full of flavour, than the present, that I love all old

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houses ; but best of all such as are solitary in the country, isolated both from new surroundings, and from such alterations as contact with the world's hurry almost always brings. It certainly is no question of beauty. The houses along Chelsea embankment are more beautiful, and some of them a great deal more picturesque than that Worcestershire rectory to which I always long to return : the long brick house on its terraced river-bank, the overladen plum-trees on one side, and the funereally prosperous churchyard yews on the other ; and with corridors and staircases hung with stained, frameless Bolognese nakedness, Judgments of Paris, Venuses, Carità Romanas, shipped over cheap by some bear-leading parson-tutor of the eighteenth century. Nor are they architectural, those brick and timber cottages all round, sinking (one might think) into the rich, damp soil. But they have a mellowness corresponding to that of the warm, wet, fruitful land, and due to the untroubled, warm brooding over by the past. And what is architecture to that ? As to these Italian ones, which my soul loveth most, they have even less of what you would call beauty ; at

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most such grace of projecting window-grating or buttressed side as the South gives its buildings ; and such colour, or rather discolouring, as a comparatively small number of years will bring.

It kept revolving in my mind, this question of old houses and their charm, as I was sitting waiting for a tram one afternoon, in the church-porch of Pieve a Ripoli, a hamlet about two miles outside the south-east gate of Florence. That church porch is like the baldacchino over certain Roman high altars, or, more humbly, like a very large fourpost bedstead. On the one hand was a hillside of purple and brown scrub and dark cypresses fringed against the moist, moving grey sky ; on the other, some old, bare, mulberry-trees, a hedge of russet sloe, closing in wintry fields ; and, more particularly, next the porch, an insignificant house, with blistered green shutters at irregular intervals in the stained whitewash, a big green door, and a little coat-of-arms—the three Strozzi half-moons—clapped on to the sharp corner. I sat there, among the tombstones of the porch, and wondered why I loved this house : and why it would remain, as I knew it



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must, a landmark in my memory. Yes, the charm must lie in the knowledge of the many creatures who have lived in this house, the many things that have been done and felt.

The creatures who have lived here, the things which have been felt and done. . . . But those things felt and done, were they not mainly trivial, base ; at best nowise uncommon, and such as must be going on in every new house all around ? People worked and shirked their work, endured, fretted, suffered somewhat, and amused themselves a little ; were loving, unkind, neglected and neglectful, and died, some too soon, some too late. That is human life, and as such doubtless important. But all that goes on to-day just the same ; and there is no reason why that former life should have been more interesting than that these people, Argenta Cavalletti and Vincenzo Grazzini, buried at my feet, should have had bigger or better made souls and bodies than I or my friends. Indeed, in sundry ways, and owing to the narrowness of life and thought, the calmer acceptance of coarse or cruel things, I incline to think that they were less interesting, those men and women of the past, whose

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rustling dresses fill old houses with fantastic sounds. They had, some few of them, their great art, great aims, feelings, struggles ; but the majority were of the earth, and intolerably earthy. 'Tis their clothes' ghosts that haunt us, not their own.

So why should the past be charming ? Perhaps merely because of its being the one free place for our imagination. For, as to the future, it is either empty or filled only with the cast shadows of ourselves and our various machineries. The past is the unreal and the yet visible ; it has the fascination of the distant hills, the valleys seen from above ; the unreal, but the unreal whose unreality, unlike that of the unreal things with which we cram the present, can never be forced on us. *There is more behind ; there may be anything.* This sense which makes us in love with all intricacies of things and feelings, roads which turn, views behind views, trees behind trees, makes the past so rich in possibilities. . . . An ordinary looking priest passes by, rings at the door of the presbytery, and enters. Those who lived there, in that old stained house with the Strozzi escutcheon, opposite the five bare



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mulberry-trees, were doubtless as like as may be to this man who lives there in the present. Quite true ; and yet there creeps up the sense that *they* lived in the past.

For there is no end to the deceits of the past ; we protest that we know it is cozening us, and it continues to cozen us just as much. Reading over Browning's *Galuppi* lately, it struck me that this dead world of vanity was no more charming or poetical than the one we live in, when it also was alive ; and that those ladies, Mrs. X., Countess Y., and Lady Z., of whose *toilettes* at last night's ball that old gossip P—— had been giving us details throughout dinner, will in their turn, if any one care, be just as charming, as dainty, and elegiac as those other women who sat by while Galuppi “played toccatas stately at the clavichord.” Their dresses, should they hang for a century or so, will emit a perfume as frail, and sad, and heady ; their wardrobe filled with such dust as makes tears come into one's eyes, from no mechanical reason.

“Was a lady *such* a lady ?” They will say that of ours also. And, in recognising this, we recognise how trumpery, flat, stale and

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## In Praise of Old Houses

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unprofitable were those ladies of the past. It is not they who make the past charming, but the past that makes them. Time has wonderful cosmetics for its favoured ones ; and if it brings white hairs and wrinkles to the realities, how much does it not heighten the bloom, brighten the eyes and hair of those who survive in our imagination !

And thus, somewhat irrelevantly, concludes my chapter in praise of old houses.

THE LIE OF THE LAND  
NOTES ABOUT LANDSCAPES



## THE LIE OF THE LAND

### NOTES ABOUT LANDSCAPES

I WANT to talk about the something which makes the real, individual landscape—the landscape one actually sees with the eyes of the body and the eyes of the spirit—*the landscape you cannot describe.*

That is the drawback of my subject—that it just happens to elude all literary treatment, \* and yet it must be treated. There is not even a single word or phrase to label it, and I have had to call it, in sheer despair, *the lie of the land* : it is an unnamed mystery into which various things enter, and I feel as if I ought to explain myself by dumb show. It will serve at any rate as an object-lesson in the extreme one-sidedness of language and a protest against human silence about the things it likes best.

Of outdoor things words can of course tell us some important points : colour, for instance,

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## The Lie of the Land

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and light, and somewhat of their gradations and relations. And an adjective, a metaphor, may evoke an entire atmospheric effect, paint us a sunset or a star-lit night. But the far subtler and more individual relations of visible line defy expression : no poet or prose writer can give you the tilt of a roof, the undulation of a field, the bend of a road. Yet these are the things in landscape which constitute its individuality and which reach home to our feelings.

For colour and light are variable—nay, more, they are relative. The same tract will be green in connection with one sort of sky, blue with another, and yellow with a third. We may be disappointed when the woods, which we had seen as vague, moss-like blue before the sun had overtopped the hills, become at midday a mere vast lettuce-bed. We should be much more than disappointed, we should doubt of our senses if we found on going to our window that it looked down upon outlines of hills, upon precipices, ledges, knolls, or flat expanses, different from those we had seen the previous day or the previous year. Thus the unvarying items of a landscape happen to be those for which precise words

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## The Lie of the Land

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cannot be found. Briefly, we praise colour, but we actually *live* in the indescribable thing which I must call the *lie of the land*. The lie of the land means walking or climbing, shelter or bleakness ; it means the corner where we dread a boring neighbour, the bend round which we have watched some one depart, the stretch of road which seemed to lead us away out of captivity. Yes, *lie of the land* is what has mattered to us since we were children, to our fathers and remotest ancestors ; and its perception, the instinctive preference for one kind rather than another, is among the obscure things inherited with our blood, and making up the stuff of our souls. For how else explain the strange powers which different shapes of the earth's surface have over different individuals ; the sudden pleasure, as of the sight of an old friend, the pang of pathos which we may all receive in a scene which is new, without memories, and so unlike everything familiar as to be almost without associations ?

The *lie of the land* has therefore an importance in art, or if it have not, ought to have, quite independent of pleasantness of line or of



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## The Lie of the Land

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anything merely visual. An immense charm consists in the fact that the mind can walk about in a landscape. The delight at the beauty which is seen is heightened by the anticipation of further unseen beauty; by the sense of exploring the unknown; and to our present pleasure before a painted landscape is added the pleasure we have been storing up during years of intercourse, if I may use this word, with so many real ones.

### II

For there is such a thing as intercourse with fields and trees and skies, with the windings of road and water and hedge, in our everyday, ordinary life. And a terrible thing for us all if there were not; if our lives were not full of such various commerce, of pleasure, curiosity, and gratitude, of kindly introduction of friend by friend, quite apart from the commerce with other human beings. Indeed, one reason why the modern rectangular town (built at one go for the convenience of running omnibuses and suppressing riots) fills our soul with bitterness and dryness, is surely that this ill-

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## The Lie of the Land

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conditioned convenient thing can give us only its own poor, paltry presence, introducing our eye and fancy neither to further details of itself, nor to other places and people, past or distant.

Words can just barely indicate the charm of this *other place other time* enriching of the present impression. Words cannot in the least, I think, render that other suggestion contained in *The Lie of the Land*, the suggestion of the possibility of a delightful walk. What walks have we not taken, leaving sacred personages and profane, not to speak of allegoric ones, far behind in the backgrounds of the old Tuscans, Umbrians, and Venetians! Up Benozzo's hillside woods of cypress and pine, smelling of myrrh and sweet-briar, over Peruginio's green rising grounds, towards those slender, scant-leaved trees, straight-stemmed acacias and elms, by the water in the cool, blue evening valley. Best of all, have not Giorgione and Titian, Palma and Bonifazio, and the dear imitative people labelled *Venetian school*, led us between the hedges russet already with the ripening of the season and hour into those fields where the sheep are nibbling, under the

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## The Lie of the Land

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twilight of the big brown trees, to where some pale blue alp closes in the slopes and the valleys ?

### III

It is a pity that the landscape painters of our day—I mean those French or French taught, whose methods are really new—tend to neglect *The Lie of the Land*. Some of them, I fear, deliberately avoid it as old-fashioned—what they call obvious—as interfering with their aim of interesting by the mere power of vision and skill in laying on the paint. Be this as it may, their innovations inevitably lead them away from all research of what we may call *topographical* charm, for what they have added to art is the perfection of very changeable conditions of light and atmosphere, of extremely fleeting accidents of colour. One would indeed be glad to open one's window on the fairyland of iridescent misty capes, of vibrating skies and sparkling seas of Monsieur Claude Monet ; still more to stand at the close of an autumn day watching the light fogs rise along the fields, mingling with delicate pinkish mist of the bare poplar rows against the green of the

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## The Lie of the Land

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first sprouts of corn. But I am not sure that the straight line of sea and shore would be interesting at any other moment of the day ; and the poplar rows and cornfields would very likely be drearily dull until sunset. The moment, like Faust's second of perfect bliss, is such as should be made immortal, but the place one would rather not see again. Yet Monsieur Monet is the one of his school who shows most care for the scene he is painting. The others, even the great ones—men like Pissarro and Sisley, who have shown us so many delightful things in the details of even the dull French foliage, even the dull midday sky—the other *modern ones* make one long to pull up their umbrella and easel and carry them on—not very far surely—to some spot where the road made a bend, the embankment had a gap, the water a swirl ; for we would not be so old-fashioned as to request that the country might have a few undulations. . . . Of course it was very dull of our ancestors—particularly of Clive Newcome's day—always to paint a panorama with whole ranges of hills, miles of river, and as many cities as possible ; and even our pleasure in Turner's large landscapes is

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spoilt by their being the sort of thing people would drive for miles or climb for hours to enjoy, what our grandfathers in post-chaises called a *noble fine prospect*. All that had to be got rid of, like the contemporaneous literary descriptions: "A smiling valley proceeded from south-east to north-west; an amphitheatre of cliffs bounding it on the right hand; while to the left a magnificent waterfall leapt from a rock three hundred feet in height and expanded into a noble natural basin of granite some fifty yards in diameter," &c. &c. The British classics, thus busy with compass, measuring-rod and level, thus anxious to enable the reader to reconstruct their landscape on paste-board, had no time of course to notice trifling matters: how, for instance,

The woods are round us, heaped and dim;  
From slab to slab how it slips and springs  
The thread of water, single and slim,  
Through the ravage some torrent brings.

Nor could the panoramic painter of the earlier nineteenth century pay much attention to mere alternations of light while absorbed in his great "Distant View of Jerusalem and Mada-



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gascar ”; indeed, he could afford to move off only when it began to rain very hard.

### IV

The impressionist painters represent the reaction against this dignified and also more stolid school of landscape; they have seen, or are still seeing, all the things which other men did not see. And here I may remark that one of the most important items of this seeing is exactly the fact that in many cases we can *see* only very little. The impressionists have been scoffed at for painting rocks which might be chimney-stacks, and flowering hedges which might be foaming brooks; plains also which might be hills, and *vice versâ*, and described as wretches, disrespectful to natural objects, which, we are told, reveal new beauties at every glance. But is it more respectful to natural objects to put a drawing-screen behind a willow-bush and copy its minutest detail of branch and trunk, than to paint that same willow, a mere mist of glorious orange, as we see it flame against the hillside confusion of mauve, and russet and pinkish sereness? I

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am glad to have brought in that word *confusion*: the modern school of landscape has done a great and pious thing in reinstating the complexity, the mystery, the confusion of Nature's effects; Nature, which differs from the paltry work of man just in this, that she does not thin out, make clear and symmetrical for the easier appreciation of foolish persons, but packs effect upon effect, in space even as in time, one close upon the other, leaf upon leaf, branch upon branch, tree upon tree, colour upon colour, a mystery of beauty wrapped in beauty, without the faintest concern whether it would not be better to say "this is really a river," or, "that is really a tree." "But," answer the critics with much superiority, "art should not be the mere copying of Nature; surely there is already enough of Nature herself; art should be the expression of man's delight in Nature's shows." Well, Nature shows a great many things which are not unchanging and not by any means unperplexing; she shows them at least to those who will see, see what is really there to be seen; and she will show them, thanks to our brave impressionists, to all men hence-



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forth who have eyes and a heart. And here comes our debt to these great painters : what a number of effects, modest and exquisite, or bizarre and magnificent, they will have taught us to look out for ; what beauty and poetry in humdrum scenery, what perfect loveliness even among sordidness and squalor : tints as of dove's breasts in city mud, enamel splendours in heaps of furnace refuse, mysterious magnificence, visions of Venice at night, of Eblis palace, of I know not what, in wet gaslit nights, in looming lit-up factories. Nay, leaving that alone, since 'tis better, perhaps, that we should not enjoy anything connected with grime and misery and ugliness—how much have not these men added to the delight of our walks and rides ; revealing to us, among other things, the supreme beauty of winter colouring, the harmony of purple, blue, slate, brown, pink, and russet, of tints and compounds of tints without a name, of bare hedgerows and leafless trees, sere grass and mist-veiled waters ; compared with which spring is but raw, summer dull, and autumn positively ostentatious in her gala suit of tawny and yellow.

Perhaps, indeed, these modern painters have

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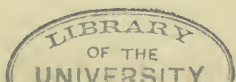
done more for us by the beauty they have taught us to see in Nature than by the beauty they have actually put before us in their pictures ; if I except some winter landscapes of Monet's and the wonderful water-colours of Mr. Brabazon, whose exquisite sense of form and knowledge of drawing have enabled him, in rapidest sketches of rapidly passing effects, to indicate the structure of hills and valleys, the shape of clouds, in the mere wash of colour, even as Nature indicates them herself. With such exceptions as these, and the beautiful mysteries of Mr. Whistler, there is undoubtedly, in recent landscape, a preoccupation of technical methods and an indifference to choice of subject, above all, a degree of insistence on what is *actually seen* which leads one to suspect that the impressionists represent rather a necessary phase in the art, than a definite achievement, in the same manner as the Renaissance painters who gave themselves up to the study of perspective and anatomy. This terrible over-importance of the act of vision is doubtless the preparation for a new kind of landscape, which will employ these arduously acquired facts of colour and light,

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this restlessly renovated technique, in the service of a new kind of sentiment and imagination, differing from that of previous ages even as the sentiment and imagination of Browning differs from that of his great predecessors. But it is probably necessary that the world at large, as well as the artists, should be familiarised with the new facts, the new methods of impressionism, before such facts and methods can find their significance and achievement ; even as in the Renaissance people had to recognise the realities of perspective and anatomy before they could enjoy an art which attained beauty through this means ; it would have been no use showing Sixtine chapels to the contemporaries of Giotto. There is at present a certain lack of enjoyable quality, a lack of soul appealing to soul, in the new school of landscape. But where there is a faithful, reverent eye, a subtle hand, a soul cannot be far round the corner. And we may hope that, if we be as sincere and willing as themselves, our Pollaiolos and Mantegnas of the impressionist school, discoverers of new subtleties of colour and light, will be duly succeeded by modern Michelangelos and Titians, who will receive



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all the science ready for use, and bid it fetch and carry and build new wonderful things for the pleasure of their soul and of ours.

### V

And mentioning Titian, brings to my memory a remark once made to me on one of those washed away, rubbly hills, cypresses and pines holding the earth together, which the old Tuscans drew so very often. The remark, namely, that some of the charm of the old masters' landscapes is due to the very reverse of what sometimes worries one in modern work, to the notion which these backgrounds give at first—bits of valley, outlines of hills, distant views of towered villages, of having been done without trouble, almost from memory, till you discover that your Titian has modelled his blue valley into delicate blue ridges; and your Piero della Francesca indicated the precise structure of his pale, bony mountains. Add to this, to the old men's credit, that, as I said, they knew *the lie of the land*, they gave us landscapes in which our fancy, our memories, could walk.

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How large a share such fancy and such memories have in the life of art, people can scarcely realise. Nay, such is the habit of thinking of the picture, statue, or poem, as a complete and vital thing apart from the mind which perceives it, that the expression *life of art* is sure to be interpreted as life of various schools of art : thus, the life of art developed from the type of Phidias to that of Praxiteles, and so forth. But in the broader, truer sense, the life of all art goes on in the mind and heart, not merely of those who make the work, but of those who see and read it. Nay, is not *the* work, the real one, a certain particular state of feeling, a pattern woven of new perceptions and impressions and of old memories and feelings, which the picture, the statue or poem, awakens, different in each different individual ? 'Tis a thought perhaps annoying to those who have slaved seven years over a particular outline of muscles, a particular colour of grass, or the cadence of a particular sentence. What ! all this to be refused finality, to be disintegrated by the feelings and fancies of the man who looks at the picture, or reads the book, heaven knows how carelessly



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besides ? Well, if not disintegrated, would you prefer it to be unassimilated ? Do you wish your picture, statue or poem to remain whole as you made it ? Place it permanently in front of a mirror ; consign it to the memory of a parrot ; or, if you are musician, sing your song, expression and all, down a phonograph. You cannot get from the poor human soul, that living microcosm of changing impressions, the thorough, wholesale appreciation which you want.

### VI

This same power of sentiment and fancy, that is to say, of association, enables us to carry about, like a verse or a tune, whole mountain ranges, valleys, rivers and lakes, things in appearance the least easy to remove from their place. As some persons are never unattended by a melody ; so others, and among them your humble servant, have always for their thoughts and feelings, an additional background besides the one which happens to be visible behind their head and shoulders. By this means I am usually in two places at a time, sometimes in several very distant ones within a few seconds.



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It is extraordinary how much of my soul seems to cling to certain peculiarities of what I have called *lie of the land*, undulations, bends of rivers, straightenings and snakings of road ; how much of one's past life, sensations, hopes, wishes, words, has got entangled in the little familiar sprigs, grasses and moss. The order of time and space is sometimes utterly subverted ; thus, last autumn, in a corner of Argyllshire, I seemed suddenly cut off from everything in the British Isles, and reunited to the life I used to lead hundreds of miles away, years ago in the high Apennines, merely because of the minute starry moss under foot and the bubble of brooks in my ears.

Nay, the power of outdoor things, their mysterious affinities, can change the values even of what has been and what has not been, can make one live for a moment in places which have never existed save in the fancy. Have I not found myself suddenly taken back to certain woods which I loved in my childhood simply because I had halted before a great isolated fir with hanging branches, a single fir shading a circle of soft green turf, and watched the rabbits sitting, like round

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grey stones suddenly flashing into white tails and movement? Woods where? I have not the faintest notion. Perhaps only woods I imagined my father must be shooting in when I was a baby, woods which I made up out of Christmas trees, moss and dead rabbits, woods I had heard of in fairy tales . . .

Such are some of the relations of landscape and sentiments, a correct notion of which is necessary before it is possible to consider the best manner of *representing landscape with words*; a subject to which none of my readers, I think, nor myself, have at present the smallest desire to pass on.

# TUSCAN MIDSUMMER MAGIC



## TUSCAN MIDSUMMER MAGIC

### I

“ THEN,” I said, “ you decline to tell me about the Three Kings, when their procession wound round and round these hillocks : all the little wooden horses with golden bridles and velvet holsters, out of the toy boxes ; and the camelpard, and the monkeys and the lynx, and the little doll pages blowing toy trumpets. And still, I know it happened here, because I recognise the place from the pictures : the hillocks all washed away into breasts like those of Diana of the Ephesians, and the rows of cypresses and spruce pines—also out of the toy box. I know it happened in this very place, because Benozzo Gozzoli painted it all at the time ; and you were already about the place, I presume ? ”

I knew that by her dress, but I did not like to allude to its being old-fashioned. It was

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## Tuscan Midsummer Magic

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the sort of thing, muslin all embroidered with little nosegays of myrtle and yellow broom, and tied into odd bunches at the elbows and waist, which they wore in the days of Botticelli's *Spring*; and on her head she had a garland of eglantine and palm-shaped hellebore leaves which was quite unmistakable.

The nymph Terzollina (for of course she was the tutelary divinity of the narrow valley behind the great Medicean Villa) merely shook her head and shifted one of her bare feet, on which she was seated under a cypress tree, and went on threading the yellow broom flowers.

"At all events, you might tell me something about the Magnificent Lorenzo," I went on, impatient at her obstinacy. "You know quite well that he used to come and court you here, and make verses most likely."

The exasperating goddess raised her thin, brown face, with the sharp squirrel's teeth and the glittering goat's eyes. Very pretty I thought her, though undoubtedly a little *passée*, like all the symbolical ladies of her set. She plucked at a clump of dry peppermint, perfuming the hot air as she crushed it, and then looked up, with a sly, shy little peasant-



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## Tuscan Midsummer Magic

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girl's look, which was absurd in a lady so mature and so elaborately adorned. Then, in a crooning voice, she began to recite some stanzas in *ottava rima*, as follows :

“The house where the good old Knight Gualando hid away the little Princess, was itself hidden in this hidden valley. It was small and quite white, with great iron bars to the windows. In front was a long piece of greensward, starred with white clover, and behind and in front, to where the pines and cypresses began ran strips of cornfield. It was remote from all the pomps of life ; and when the cuckoo had become silent and the nightingales had cracked their voices, the only sound was the coo of the wood-pigeons, the babble of the stream, and the twitter of the young larks.

“The old Knight Gualando had hidden his bright armour in an oaken chest ; and went to the distant town every day dressed in the blue smock of a peasant, and driving a donkey before him. Thence he returned with delicacies for the little Princess and with news of the wicked usurper ; nor did any one suspect who he was, or dream of his hiding-place.

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## Tuscan Midsummer Magic

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“During his absence the little Princess, whose name was Fiordispina, used to string beads through the hot hours when the sun smote through the trees, and the green corn ridges began to take a faint gilding in their silveriness, as the Princess remembered it in a picture in the Castle Chapel, where the sun was represented by a big embossed ball of gold, projecting from the picture, which she was allowed to stroke on holidays.

“In the evening, when the sky turned pearl white, and a breeze rustled through the pines and cypresses which made a little black fringe on the hill-top and a little patch of feathery velvet pile on the slopes, the little Princess would come forth, and ramble about in her peasant’s frock, her fair face stained browner by the sun than by any walnut juice. She would climb the hill, and sniff the scent of the sun-warmed resin, and the sweetness of the yellow broom. It spread all over the hills, and the king, her father, had not possessed so many ells of cloth of gold.

“But one evening she wandered further than usual, and saw on a bank, at the edge of a cornfield, five big white lilies blowing. She

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## Tuscan Midsummer Magic

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went back home and fetched the golden scissors from her work-bag, and cut off one of the lilies. On the next day she came again and cut another until she had cut them all.

“But it happened that an old witch was staying in that neighbourhood, gathering herbs among the hills. She had taken note of the five lilies, because she disliked them on account of their being white; and she remarked that one of them had been cut off; then another, then another. She hated people who like lilies. When she found the fifth lily gone, she wondered greatly, and climbed on the ridge, and looked at their stalks where they were cut. She was a wise woman, who knew many things. So she laid her finger upon the cut stalk, and said, ‘This has not been cut with iron shears’; and she laid her lip against the cut stalk, and felt that it had been cut with gold shears, for gold cuts like nothing else.

“‘Oho!’ said the old witch—‘where there are gold scissors, there must be gold work-bags; and where there are gold work-bags, there must be little Princesses.’”

“Well, and then?” I asked.

“Oh then, nothing at all,” answered the

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Nymph Terzollina beloved by the Magnificent Lorenzo, who had seen the procession of the Three Kings. "Good evening to you."

And where her white muslin dress, embroidered with nosegays of broom and myrtle, had been spread on the dry grass and crushed mint, there was only, beneath the toy cypresses, a bush of white-starred myrtle and a tuft of belated yellow broom.

### II

One must have leisure to converse with goddesses ; and certainly, during a summer in Tuscany, when folk are scattered in their country houses, and are disinclined to move out of hammock or off shaded bench, there are not many other persons to talk with.

On the other hand, during those weeks of cloudless summer, natural objects vie with each other in giving one amateur representations. Things look their most unexpected, masquerade as other things, get queer unintelligible allegoric meanings, leaving you to guess what it all means, a constant dumb-

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## Tuscan Midsummer Magic

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crambo of trees, flowers, animals, houses, and moonlight.

The moon, particularly, is continually *en scène*, as if to take the place of the fireflies, which last only so long as the corn is in the ear, gradually getting extinguished and trailing about, humble helpless moths with a pale phosphorescence in their tail, in the grass and in the curtains. The moon takes their place; the moon which, in an Italian summer, seems to be full for three weeks out of the four.

One evening the performance was given by the moon and the corn-sheaves, assisted by minor actors such as crickets, downy owls, and vine-garlands. The oats, which had been of such exquisite delicacy of green, had just been reaped in the field beyond our garden and were now stacked up. Suspecting one of the usual performances, I went after dinner to the upper garden-gate, and looked through the bars. There it was, the familiar, elemental witchery. The moon was nearly full, blurring the stars, steeping the sky and earth in pale blue mist, which seemed somehow to be the visible falling dew. It left a certain greenness to the broad grass path, a vague yellow to the



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unsickled wheat ; and threw upon the sheaves of oats the shadows of festooned vine garlands. Those sheaves, or stooks—who can describe their metamorphose ? Palest yellow on the pale stubbly ground, they were frosted by the moonbeams in their crisp fringe of ears, and in the shining straws projecting here and there. Straws, ears ? You would never have guessed that they were made of anything so mundane. They sat there, propped against the trees, between the pools of light and the shadows, while the crickets trilled their cool, shrill song ; sat solemnly with an air of expectation, calling to me, frightening me. And one in particular, with a great additional bunch on his head, cut by a shadow, was oddly unaccountable and terrible. After a minute I had to slink away, back into the garden, like an intruder.

### III

There are performances also in broad daylight, and then human beings are admitted as supernumeraries. Such was a certain cattle fair, up the valley of the Mugnone.



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The beasts were being sold on a piece of rough, freshly reaped ground, lying between the high road and the river bed, empty of waters, but full among its shingle of myrrh-scented yellow herbage. The oxen were mostly of the white Tuscan breeds (those of Romagna are smaller but more spirited, and of a delicate grey) only their thighs slightly browned; the scarlet cloth neck-fringes set off, like a garland of geranium, against the perfect milkiness of backs and necks. They looked, indeed, these gigantic creatures, as if moulded out of whipped cream or cream cheese; suggesting no strength, and even no resistance to the touch, with their smooth surface here and there packed into minute wrinkles, exactly like the little *stracchini* cheeses. This impalpable whiteness of the beasts suited their perfect tameness, passiveness, letting themselves be led about with great noiseless strides over the stubby ridges and up the steep banks; and hustled together, flank against flank, horns interlaced with horns, without even a sound or movement of astonishment or disobedience. Never a low or a moo; never a glance round of their big,

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long-lashed, blue-brown eyes. Their big jaws move like millstones, their long tufted tails switch monotonously like pendulums.

Around them circle peasants, measuring them with the eye, prodding them with the finger, pulling them by the horns. And every now and then one of the red-faced men, butchers mainly, who act as go-betweens, dramatically throws his arms round the neck of some recalcitrant dealer or buyer, leads him aside, whispering with a gesture like Judas's kiss ; or he clasps together the red hands and arms of contracting parties, silencing their objections, forcing them to do business. The contrast is curious between these hot, excited, yelling, jostling human beings, above whose screaming *Dio Canes !* and *Dio Ladros !* the cry of the iced-water seller recurs monotonously and the silent, impassive bullocks, white, unreal, inaudible ; so still and huge, indeed, that, seen from above, they look like an encampment, their white flanks like so much spread canvas in the sunshine. And from a little distance, against the hillside beyond the river, the already bought yokes of bullocks look, tethered in a grove of cypresses, like some old

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mediæval allegory—an allegory, as usual, nobody knows of what.

### IV

Another performance was that of the woods of Lecceto, and the hermitage of the same name. You will find them on the map of the district of Siena; but I doubt very much whether you will find them on the surface of the real globe, for I suspect them to be a piece of midsummer magic and nothing more. They had been for years to me among the number (we all have such) of things familiar but inaccessible; or rather things whose inaccessibility—due to no conceivable cause—is an essential quality of their existence. Every now and then from one of the hills you get a glimpse of the square red tower, massive and battlemented, rising among the grey of its ilexes, beckoning one across a ridge or two and a valley; then disappearing again, engulfed in the oak woods, green in summer, copper-coloured in winter; to reappear, but on the side you least expected it, plume of ilexes, battlements of tower, as you twisted

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along the high-lying vineyards and the clusters of umbrella pines fringing the hill-tops ; and then, another minute and they were gone.

We determined to attain them, to be mocked no longer by Lecceto ; and went forth on one endless July afternoon. After much twisting from hillside to hillside and valley to valley, we at last got into a country which was strange enough to secrete even Lecceto. In a narrow valley we were met by a scent, warm, delicious, familiar, which seemed to lead us (as perfumes we cannot identify will usually do) to ideas very hazy, but clear enough to be utterly inappropriate : English cottage-gardens, linen presses of old houses, old-fashioned sitting-rooms full of pots of *pot-pourri* ; and then, behold, in front of us a hill covered every inch of it with flowering lavender, growing as heather does on the hills outside fairyland. And behind this lilac, sun-baked, scented hill, open the woods of ilexes. The trees were mostly young and with their summer upper garment of green, fresh leaves over the crackling old ones ; trees packed close like a hedge, their every gap filled with other verdure, arbutus and hornbeam, fern and heather ; the

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close-set greenery crammed, as it were, with freshness and solitude.

These must be the woods of Lecceto, and in their depths the red battlemented tower of the Hermitage. For I had forgotten to say that for a thousand years that tower had been the abode of a succession of holy personages, so holy and so like each other as to have almost grown into one, an immortal hermit whom Popes and Emperors would come to consult and be blessed by. Deeper and deeper therefore we made our way into the green coolness and dampness, the ineffable deliciousness of young leaf and uncurling fern ; till it seemed as if the plantation were getting impenetrable, and we began to think that, as usual, Lecceto had mocked us, and would probably appear, if we retraced our steps, in the diametrically opposite direction. When suddenly, over the tree-tops, rose the square battlemented tower of red brick. Then, at a turn of the rough narrow lane, there was the whole place, the tower, a church and steeple, and some half-fortified buildings, in a wide clearing planted with olive trees. We tied our pony to an ilex and went to explore the Hermitage. But the



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building was enclosed round by walls and hedges, and the only entrance was by a stout gate armed with a knocker, behind which was apparently an outer yard and a high wall pierced only by a twisted iron balcony. So we knocked.

But that knocker was made only for Popes and Emperors walking about with their tiaras and crowns and sceptres, like the genuine Popes and Emperors of Italian folk-tales and of Pinturicchio's frescoes; for no knocking of ours, accompanied by loud yells, could elicit an answer. It seemed simple enough to get in some other way; there must be peasants about at work, even supposing the holy hermit to have ceased to exist. But climbing walls and hurdles and squeezing between the close tight ilexes, brought us only to more walls, above which, as above the oak-woods from a distance, rose the inaccessible battlemented tower. And a small shepherdess, in a flapping Leghorn hat, herding black and white baby pigs in a neighbouring stubble-field under the olives, was no more able than we to break the spell of the Hermitage. And all round, for miles apparently, undulated the dense grey plumage of the ilex woods.



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The low sun was turning the stubble orange, where the pigs were feeding ; and the distant hills of the Maremma were growing very blue behind the olive trees. So, lest night should overtake us, we turned our pony's head towards the city, and traversed the oak-woods and skirted the lavender hill, rather disbelieving in the reality of the place we had just been at, save when we saw its tower mock us, emerging again ; an inaccessible, improbable place. The air was scented by the warm lavender of the hillsides ; and by the pines forming a Japanese pattern, black upon the golden lacquer of the sky. Soon the moon rose, big and yellow, lighting very gradually the road in whose gloom you could vaguely see the yokes of white cattle returning from work. By the time we reached the city hill everything was steeped in a pale yellowish light, with queer yellowish shadows ; and the tall tanneries glared out with their buttressed balconied top, exaggerated and alarming. Scrambling up the moonlit steep of Fonte Branda, and passing under a black arch, we found ourselves in the heart of the gaslit and crowded city, much as if we had been shot out of a

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cannon into another planet, and feeling that the Hermitage of Lecceto was absolutely apocryphal.

### V

The reason of this midsummer magic—whose existence no legitimate descendant of Goths and Vandals and other early lovers of Italy can possibly deny—the reason is altogether beyond my philosophy. The only word which expresses the phenomenon is the German word, untranslatable, *Bescheerung*, a universal giving of gifts, lighting of candles, gilding of apples, manifestation of marvels, realisation of the desirable and improbable—to wit, a Christmas Tree. And Italy, which knows no Christmas trees, makes its *Bescheerung* in midsummer, gets rid of its tourist vulgarities, hides away the characteristics of its trivial nineteenth century, decks itself with magnolia blossoms and water-melons with awnings and street booths, with mandolins and guitars; spangles itself with church festivals and local pageants; and instead of wax-tapers and Chinese lanterns, lights up the biggest golden sun by day, the

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biggest silver moon by night, all for the benefit of a few childish descendants of Goths and Vandals.

Nonsense apart, I am inclined to think that the specific charm of Italy exists only during the hot months ; the charm which gives one a little stab now and then and makes one say—"This is Italy."

I felt that little stab, to which my heart had long become unused, at the beginning of this very summer in Tuscany, to which belong the above instances of Italian Midsummer Magic. I was spending the day at a small, but very ancient, Benedictine Monastery (it was a century old when St. Peter Igneus, according to the chronicle, went through his celebrated Ordeal by Fire), now turned into a farm, and hidden, battlemented walls and great gate towers, among the cornfields near the Arno. It came to me as the revival of an impression long forgotten, that overpowering sense that "This was Italy," it recurred and recurred in those same three words, as I sat under the rose-hedge opposite the water-wheel shed, garlanded with drying pea-straw ; and as I rambled through the chill vaults, redolent of

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old wine-vats, into the sudden sunshine and broad shadows of the cloistered yards.

That smell was mysteriously connected with it; the smell of wine-vats mingled, I fancy (though I could not say why), with the sweet faint smell of decaying plaster and wood-work. One night, as we were driving through Bologna to wile away the hours between two trains, in the blue moon-mist and deep shadows of the black porticoed city, that same smell came to my nostrils as in a dream, and with it a whiff of bygone years, the years when first I had had this impression of Italian Magic. Oddly enough, Rome, where I spent much of my childhood and which was the object of my childish and tragic adoration, was always something apart, never Italy for my feelings. The Apennines of Lucca and Pistoia, with their sudden revelation of Italian fields and lanes, of flowers on wall and along roadside, of bells ringing in the summer sky, of peasants working in the fields and with the loom and distaff, meant Italy.

But how much more Italy—and hence longed for how much!—was Lucca, the town in the plain, with cathedral and palaces. Nay,

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any of the mountain hamlets where there was nothing modern, and where against the scarred brick masonry and blackened stonework the cypresses rose black and tapering, the trellises crawled bright green up hill! One never feels, once out of childhood, such joy as on the rare occasions when I was taken to such places. A certain farmhouse, with cypresses at the terrace corner and a great oleander over the wall, was also Italy before it became my home for several years. Most of all, however, Italy was represented by certain towns: Bologna, Padua and Vicenza, and Siena, which I saw mainly in the summer.

It is curious how one's associations change: nowadays Italy means mainly certain familiar effects of light and cloud, certain exquisite-nesses of sunset amber against ultramarine hills, of winter mists among misty olives, of folds and folds of pale blue mountains; it is a country which belongs to no time, which will always exist, superior to picturesqueness and romance. But that is but a vague, half-indifferent habit of enjoyment. And every now and then, when the Midsummer Magic is rife, there comes to me that very different, old, childish meaning of



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the word ; as on that day among the roses of those Benedictine cloisters, the cool shadow of the fig-trees in the yards, with the whiff of that queer smell, heavy with romance, of wine-saturated oak and crumbling plaster ; and I know with a little stab of joy that this is Italy.



## ON MODERN TRAVELLING



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### I

THERE is one charming impression peculiar to railway travelling, that of the twilight hour in the train ; but the charm is greater on a short journey, when one is not tired and has not the sense of being uprooted, than on a long one. The movement of the train seems, after sunset, particularly in the South where night-fall is rapid, to take a quality of mystery. It glides through a landscape of which the smaller details are effaced, as are likewise effaced the details of the railway itself. And that rapid gliding brings home to one the instability of the hour, of the changing light, the obliterating form. It makes one feel that everything is, as it were, a mere vision ; bends of poplared river with sunset redness in their grey swirls ; big towered houses of other days ; the spectral white fruit trees in the dark fields ; the pine

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tops round, separate, yet intangible, against the sky of unearthly blue ; the darkness not descending, as foolish people say it does, from the skies to the earth, but rising slowly from the earth where it has gathered fold upon fold, an emanation thereof, into the sky still pale and luminous, turning its colour to white, its whiteness to grey, till the stars, mere little white specks before, kindle one by one.

Dante, who had travelled so much, and so much against his will, described this hour as turning backwards the longing of the traveller, and making the heart grow soft of them who had that day said farewell to their friends. It is an hour of bitterness, the crueller for mingled sweetness, to the exile ; and in those days when distances were difficult to overcome, every traveller must in a sense have been somewhat of an exile. But to us, who have not necessarily left our friends, who may be returning to them ; to us accustomed to coming and going, to us hurried along in dreary swiftness, it is the hour also when the earth seems full of peace and goodwill ; and our pensiveness is only just sad enough to be sweet, not sad enough to be bitter. For every hamlet we pass seems somehow the

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place where we ought to tarry for all our days ; every room or kitchen, a red square of light in the dimness with dark figures moving before the window, seems full of people who might be friends ; and the hills we have never beheld before, the bends of rivers, the screen of trees, seem familiar as if we had lived among them in distant days which we think of with longing.

### II

This is the best that can be said, I think, for modern modes of travel. But then, although I have been jolted about a good deal from country to country, and slept in the train on my nurse's knees, and watched all my possessions, from my cardboard donkey and my wax dolls to my manuscripts and proof-sheets, overhauled on custom-house counters—but then, despite all this, I have never made a great journey. I have never been to the United States, nor to Egypt, nor to Russia ; and it may well be that I shall see the Eleusinian gods, Persephone and whoever else imparts knowledge in ghostland, without ever having set foot in Greece. My remarks are therefore

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meant for the less fortunate freight of railways and steamers ; though do I really envy those who see the wonderful places of the earth before they have dreamed of them, the dream-land of other men revealed to them for the first time in the solid reality of Cook and Gaze ?

I would not for the world be misunderstood ; I have not the faintest prejudice against Gaze or Cook. I fervently desire that these gentlemen may ever quicken trains and cheapen hotels ; I am ready to be jostled in Alpine valleys and Venetian canals by any number of vociferous tourists, for the sake of the one, schoolmistress, or clerk, or artisan, or curate, who may by this means have reached at last the land east of the sun and west of the moon, the St. Brandan's Isle of his or her longings. What I object to are the well-mannered, well-dressed, often well-informed persons who, having turned Scotland into a sort of Hurlingham, are apparently making Egypt, the Holy Land, Japan, into *succursales* and *dépendances* (I like the good Swiss names evoking couriers and waiters) of their own particularly dull portion of London and Paris and New York.

Less externally presentable certainly, but



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how much more really venerable is the mysterious class of dwellers in obscure pensions : curious beings who migrate without perceiving any change of landscape and people, but only change of fare, from the cheap boarding-house in Dresden to the cheap boarding-house in Florence, Prague, Seville, Rouen, or Bruges. It is a class whom one of nature's ingenious provisions, intended doubtless to maintain a balance of inhabited and uninhabited, directs unconsciously, automatically to the great cities of the past rather than to those of the present ; so that they sit in what were once palaces, castles, princely pleasure-houses, discussing over the stony pears and apples the pleasures and drawbacks, the prices and fares, the dark staircase against the Sunday ices, of other boarding-houses in other parts of Europe. A quaint race it is, neither marrying nor giving in marriage, and renewed by natural selection among the poor in purse and poor in spirit ; but among whom the sentimental traveller, did he still exist, might pick up many droll and melancholy and perhaps chivalrous stories.

My main contention then is merely that,

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before visiting countries and towns in the body, we ought to have visited them in the spirit ; otherwise I fear we might as well sit still at home. I do not mean that we should read about them ; some persons I know affect to extract a kind of pleasure from it ; but to me it seems dull work. One wants to visit unknown lands in company, not with other men's descriptions, but with one's own wishes and fancies. And very curious such wishes and fancies are, or rather the countries and cities they conjure up, having no existence on any part of the earth's surface, but a very vivid one in one's own mind. Surely most of us, arriving in any interesting place, are already furnished with a tolerable picture or plan thereof ; the cathedral on a slant or a rising ground, the streets running uphill or somewhat in a circle, the river here or there, the lie of the land, colour of the houses, nay, the whole complexion of the town, so and so. The reality, so far as my own experience goes, never once tallies with the fancy ; but the town of our building is so compact and clear that it often remains in our memory alongside of the town of stone and brick, only gradually dissolving, and then leav-

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ing sometimes airy splendours of itself hanging to the solid structures of its prosaic rival.

Another curious thing to note is how certain real scenes will sometimes get associated in our minds with places we have never beheld, to such a point that the charm of the known is actually enhanced by that of the unknown. I remember a little dell in the High Alps, which, with its huge larches and mountain pines, its tufts of bee-haunted heather and thyme among the mossy boulders, its overlooking peak and glimpses of far-down lakes, became dear to me much less for its own sake than because it always brought to my mind the word *Thrace*, and with it a vague fleeting image of satyrs and mænads, a bar of the music of Orpheus. And less explicable than this, a certain rolling tableland, not more remote than the high road to Rome, used at one time to impress me with a mysterious consciousness of the plains of Central Asia ; a ruined byre, a heap of white-washed stones, among the thistles and stubbles of a Fife hillside, had for me once a fascination due to the sense that it must be like Algeria.

Has any painter ever fixed on canvas such visions, distinct and haunting, of lands he had

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never seen, Claude or Turner, or the Flemish people who painted the little towered and domed celestial Jerusalem ? I know not. The nearest thing of the kind was a wonderful erection of brown paper and (apparently) ingeniously arranged shavings, built up in rock-like fashion, covered with little green toy-box trees, and dotted here and there with bits of mirror glass and cardboard houses, which once puzzled me considerably in the parlour of a cottage. "Do tell me what that is ?" at last rose to my lips. "That," answered my hostess very slowly, "that is a work of my late 'usband ; a representation of the Halps as close as 'e could imagine them, for 'e never was abroad." I often think of that man "who never was abroad," and of his representation of the Alps ; of the hours of poetic vision, of actual creation perhaps from sheer strength of longing, which resulted in that quaint work of art.

As close as he could imagine them ! He had read, then, about the Alps, read perhaps in Byron or some Radcliffian novel on a stall ; and he had wondered till the vision had come, ready for pasteboard and toy trees and glue and broken mirror to embody it ! And mean-

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while I, who am obliged to cross those very Alps twice every year, I try to do so at night, to rumble and rattle up and down their gorges in a sleeping-car ! There seems something wrong in this ; something wrong in the world's adjustments, not really in me, for I swear it is respect for the Alps which makes me thus avoid their sight.

### III

And here is the moment for stating my plea against our modern, rapid, hurried travelling : there is to decent minds a certain element of humiliation therein, as I suspect there is in every *royal road*. There is something almost superhumanly selfish in this rushing across countries without giving them a thought, indeed with no thoughts in us save of our convenience, inconvenience, food, sleep, weariness. The whole of Central Europe is thus reduced, for our feelings, to an arrangement of buffets and custom-houses, its acres checked off on our sensorium as so many jolts. For it is not often that respectable people spend a couple of days, or even three, so utterly



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engrossed in themselves, so without intellectual relation or responsibility to their surroundings, living in a moral stratum not above ordinary life, but below it. Perhaps it is this suspending of connection with all interests which makes such travelling restful to very busy persons, and agreeable to very foolish ones. But to decent, active, leisured folk it is, I maintain, humiliating; humiliating to become so much by comparison in one's own consciousness; and I suspect that the vague sense of self-disgust attendant on days thus spent is a sample of the self-disgust we feel very slightly (and ought to feel very strongly) whenever our wretched little self is allowed to occupy the whole stage of our perceptions.

There is in M. Zola's *Bête Humaine* a curious picture of a train, one train after another, full of eager modern life, being whirled from Paris to Havre through the empty fields, before cottages and old-world houses miles remote from any town. But in reality is not the train the empty thing, and are not those solitary houses and pastures that which is filled with life? The Roman express thus rushes to Naples, Egypt, India, the far East, the great



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Austral islands, cutting in two the cypress avenue of a country house of the Val d'Arno, Neptune with his conch, a huge figure of the seventeenth century, looking on from an artificial grotto. What to him is this miserable little swish past of to-day?

There is only one circumstance when this vacuity, this suspension of all real life, is in its place; when one is hurrying to some dreadful goal, a death-bed or perhaps a fresh-made grave. The soul is precipitated forward to one object, one moment, and cannot exist meanwhile; *ruit* not *hora*, but *anima*; emptiness suits passion and suffering, for they empty out the world.

### IV

Be this as it may, it will be a great pity if we lose a certain sense of wonder at distance overcome, a certain emotion of change of place. This emotion—paid for no doubt by much impatience and weariness where the plains were wide, the mountains high, or the roads persistently straight—must have been one of the great charms of the old mode of travelling. You savoured the fact of each change in the

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lie of the land, of each variation in climate and province, the difference between the chestnut and the beech zones, for instance, in the south, of the fir and the larch in the Alps; the various types of window, roof, chimney, or well, nay, the different fold of the cap or kerchief of the market women. One inn, one square, one town-hall or church, introduced you gradually to its neighbours. We feel this in the talk of old people, those who can remember buying their team at Calais, of elderly ones who chartered their *vetturino* at Marseilles or Nice; in certain scraps in the novels even of Thackeray, giving the sense of this gradual occupation of the continent by relays. One of Mr. Ruskin's drawings at Oxford evokes it strongly in me. On what railway journey would he have come across that little town of Rheinfelden (where is Rheinfelden?), would he have wandered round those quaint towered walls, over that bridge, along that grassy walk?

I can remember, in my childhood, the Alps before they had railways; the enormous remoteness of Italy, the sense of its lying<sup>n</sup> down there, far, far away in its southern sea; the

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immense length of the straight road from Bellinzona to the lake, the endlessness of the winding valleys. Now, as I said in relation to that effigy of the Alps by the man who had never been abroad, I get into my bunk at Milan, and waking up, see in the early morning crispness, the glass-green Reuss tear past, and the petticoated turrets of Lucerne.

Once also (and I hope not once and never again) I made an immense journey through Italy in a pony-cart. We seemed to traverse all countries and climates ; lush, stifling valleys with ripening maize and grapes ; oak-woods where rows of cypress showed roads long gone, and crosses told of murders ; desolate heaths high on hill-tops, and stony gorges full of myrtle ; green irrigated meadows with plashing water-wheels, and grey olive groves ; so that in the evening we felt homesick for that distant, distant morning : yet we had only covered as much ground as from London to Dover ! And how immensely far off from Florence did we not feel when, four hours after leaving its walls, we arrived in utter darkness at the friendly mountain farm, and sat down to supper in the big bare room, where

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high-backed chairs and the plates above the immense chimney-piece loomed and glimmered in the half-light; feeling, as if in a dream, the cool night air still in our throats, the jingle of cart-bells and chirp of wayside crickets still in our ears! Where was Florence then? As a fact it was just sixteen miles off.

To travel in this way one should, however, as old John Evelyn advises, "diet with the natives." Our ancestors (for one takes for granted, of course, that one's ancestors were *milords*) were always plentifully furnished, I observe, with letters of introduction. They were necessary when persons of distinction carried their bedding on mules and rode in coaches escorted by blunderbuses, like John Evelyn himself.

It is this dieting with the natives which brings one fully in contact with a country's reality. At the tables of one's friends, while being strolled through the gardens or driven across country, one learns all about the life, thoughts, feelings of the people; the very gossip of the neighbourhood becomes instructive, and you touch the past through traditions of the family. Here the French put up the

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maypole in 1796; there the beautiful abbess met her lover; that old bowed man was the one who struck the Austrian colonel at Milan before 1859. 'Tis the mode of travelling that constituted the delight and matured the genius of Stendhal, king of cosmopolitans and grand master of the psychologic novel. To my kind friends, wherever I have any, but most perhaps in Northern Italy, is due among other kinds of gratitude, gratitude for having travelled in this way.

### V

But there is another way of travelling, more suitable methinks to the poet. For what does the poet want with details of reality when he possesses its universal essence, or with local manners and historic tradition, seeing that his work is for all times and all men?

Mr. Browning, I was told last year by his dear friends at Asolo, first came upon the kingdom of Kate the Queen by accident, perhaps not having heard its name or not remembering it, in the course of a long walking tour from Venice to the Alps. It was the first time he was in Italy, nay, abroad, and he had come



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## On Modern Travelling

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from London to Venice by sea. That village of palaces on the hill-top, with the Lombard plain at its feet and the great Alps at its back ; with its legends of the Queen of Cyprus was, therefore, one of the first impressions of mainland Italy which the poet could have received. And one can understand *Pippa Passes* resulting therefrom, better than from his years of familiarity with Florence. Pippa, Sebald, Ottima, Jules, his bride, the Bishop, the Spy, nay, even Queen Kate and her Page, are all born of that sort of misinterpretation of places, times, and stories which is so fruitful in poetry, because it means the begetting of things in the image of the poet's own soul, rather than the fashioning them to match something outside it.

Even without being a poet you may profit in an especial manner by travelling in a country where you know no one, provided you have in you that scrap of poetic fibre without which poets and poetry are caviare to you. There is no doubt that wandering about in the haunts of the past undisturbed by the knowledge of the present is marvellously favourable to the historic, the poetical emotion. The American fresh from the States thinks of Johnson and



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## On Modern Travelling

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Dickens in Fleet Street ; at Oxford or Cambridge he has raptures (are any raptures like these ?) into which, like notes in a chord and overtones in a note, there enters the deliciousness, the poignancy of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Turner.

The Oxford or Cambridge man, on the other hand, will have similar raptures in some boarding-house at Venice or Florence ; raptures rapturous in proportion almost to his ignorance of the language and the people. Do not let us smile, dear friends, who have lived in Rome till you are Romans, dear friends, who are Romans yourselves, at the foreigner with his Baedeker, turning his back to the Colosseum in his anxiety to reach it, and ashamed as well as unable to ask his way. That Goth or Vandal, very likely, is in the act of possessing Rome, of making its wonder and glory his own, substantial to his soul ; Rome is his for the moment. It is ours ? Alas !

Nature, Fate, I know not whether the mother or the daughter, they are so like each other, looks with benignity upon these poor ignorant, solitary tourists, and gives them what she denies to those who have more leisure and

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## On Modern Travelling

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opportunity. I cannot explain by any other reason a fact which is beyond all possibility of doubt, and patent to the meanest observer, namely, that it is always during our first sojourn in a place, during its earlier part, and more particularly when we are living prosaically at inns and boarding-houses, that something happens—a procession, a serenade, a street-fight, a fair, or a pilgrimage—which shows the place in a particularly characteristic light, and which never occurs again. The very elements are desired to perform for the benefit of the stranger. I remember a thunderstorm, the second night I was ever at Venice, lighting up St. George's, the Salute, the whole lagoon as I have never seen it since.

I can testify, also, to having seen the Alhambra under snow, a sparkling whiteness lying soft on the myrtle hedges, and the reflection of arches and domes waving, with the drip of melted snow from the roofs, in the long-stagnant tanks. If I lived in Granada, or went back there, should I ever see this wonder again? It was so ordered merely because I had just come, and was lodging at an inn.

[ Yes, Fate is friendly to those who travel

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## On Modern Travelling

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rarely, who go abroad to see abroad, not to be warm or cold, or to meet the people they may meet anywhere else. Honour the tourist; he walks in a halo of romance. The cosmopolitan abroad desists from flannel shirts because he is always at home; and he knows to a nicety hours and places which demand a high hat. But does that compensate?

### VI

There is yet another mystery connected with travelling, but 'tis too subtle almost for words. All I can ask is, do you know what it is to meet, say, in some college room, or on the staircase of an English country house, or even close behind the front door in Bloomsbury, the photograph of some Florentine relief or French cathedral, the black, gaunt Piranesi print of some Roman ruin; and to feel suddenly Florence, Rouen, Reims, or Rome, the whole of their presence distilled, as it were, into one essence of emotion?

What does it mean? That in this solid world only delusion is worth having? Nay;

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## On Modern Travelling

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but that nothing can come into the presence of that capricious despot, our fancy, which has not dwelt six months and six in the purlieus of its palace, steeped, like the candidates for Ahasuerus's favour, in sweet odours and myrrh.

# OLD ITALIAN GARDENS





## OLD ITALIAN GARDENS

### I

THERE are also modern gardens in Italy, and in such I have spent many pleasant hours. But that has been part of my life of reality, which concerns only my friends and myself. The gardens I would speak about are those in which I have lived the life of the fancy, and into which I may lead the idle thoughts of my readers.

It is pleasant to have flowers growing in a garden. I make this remark because there have been very fine gardens without any flowers at all ; in fact, when the art of gardening reached its height, it took to despising its original material, as, at one time, people came to sing so well that it was considered vulgar to have any voice. There is a magnificent garden near Pescia, in Tuscany, built in terraces against a hillside, with wonderful waterworks, which give you shower-baths when you expect

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## Old Italian Gardens

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them least ; and in this garden, surrounded by the trimmest box hedges, there bloom only imperishable blossoms of variegated pebbles and chalk. That I have seen with my own eyes. A similar garden, near Genoa, consisting of marble mosaics and coloured bits of glass, with a peach tree on a wall, and an old harpsichord on the doorstep to serve instead of bell or knocker, I am told of by a friend, who pretends to have spent her youth in it. But I suspect her to be of supernatural origin, and this garden to exist only in the world of Ariosto's enchantresses, whence she originally hails. To return to my first remark, it is pleasant, therefore, to have flowers in a garden, though not necessary. We moderns have flowers, and no gardens. I must protest against such a state of things. Still worse is it to suppose that you can get a garden by running up a wall or planting a fence round a field, a wood or any portion of what is vaguely called Nature. Gardens have nothing to do with Nature, or not much. Save the garden of Eden, which was perhaps no more a garden than certain London streets so called, gardens are always primarily the work of man. I say

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## Old Italian Gardens

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primarily, for these outdoor habitations, where man weaves himself carpets of grass and gravel, cuts himself walls out of ilex or horn-beam, and fits on as roof so much of blue day or of starspecked, moonsilvered night, are never perfect until Time has furnished it all with his weather stains and mosses, and Fancy, having given notice to the original occupants, has handed it into the charge of gentle little owls and furgloved bats, and of other tenants, human in shape, but as shy and solitary as they.

That is a thing of our days, or little short of them. I should be curious to know something of early Italian gardens, long ago ; long before the magnificence of Roman Cæsars had reappeared, with their rapacity and pride, in the cardinals and princes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I imagine those beginnings to have been humble ; the garden of the early middle ages to have been a thing more for utility than pleasure, and not at all for ostentation. For the garden of the castle is necessarily small ; and the plot of ground between the inner and outer rows of walls, where corn and hay might be grown for the horses, is not likely to be given up exclusively

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## Old Italian Gardens

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to her ladyship's lilies and gillyflowers ; salads and roots must grow there, and onions and leeks, for it is not always convenient to get vegetables from the villages below, particularly when there are enemies or disbanded pillaging mercenaries about ; hence, also, there will be fewer roses than vines, pears, or apples, spaliered against the castle wall. On the other hand the burgher of the towns begins by being a very small artisan or shopkeeper, and even when he lends money to kings of England and Emperors, and is part owner of Constantinople, he keeps his house with business-like frugality. Whatever they lavished on churches, frescoes, libraries, and pageants, the citizens, even of the fifteenth century, whose wives and daughters still mended the linen and waited at table, are not likely to have seen in their villa more than a kind of rural place of business, whence to check factors and peasants, where to store wine and oil ; and from whose garden, barely enclosed from the fields, to obtain the fruit and flowers for their table. I think that mediæval poetry and tales have led me to this notion. There is little mention in them of a garden as such : the

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## Old Italian Gardens

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Provençal lovers meet in orchards—"en un vergier sor folha d'albespi"—where the May bushes grow among the almond trees. Boccaccio and the Italians more usually employ the word *orto*, which has lost its Latin signification, and is a place, as we learn from the context, planted with fruit trees and with pot-herbs, the sage which brought misfortune on poor Simona, and the sweet basil which Lisabetta watered, as it grew out of Lorenzo's head, "only with rosewater, or that of orange flowers, or with her own tears." A friend of mine has painted a picture of another of Boccaccio's ladies, Madonna Dianora, visiting the garden, which (to the confusion of her virtuous stratagem) the enamoured Ansaldo has made to bloom in January by magic arts; a little picture full of the quaint lovely details of Dello's wedding chests, the charm of the roses and lilies, the plashing fountains and birds singing against a background of wintry trees and snow-shrouded fields, the dainty youths and damsels treading their way among the flowers, looking like tulips and ranunculus themselves in their fur and brocade. But although in this story Boccaccio employs the



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## Old Italian Gardens

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word *giardino* instead of *orto*, I think we must imagine that magic flower garden rather as a corner—they still exist on every hillside—of orchard connected with the fields of wheat and olives below by the long tunnels of vine trellis, and dying away into them with the great tufts of lavender and rosemary and fennel on the grassy bank under the cherry trees. This piece of terraced ground along which the water—spurred from the dolphin's mouth or the siren's breasts—runs through walled channels, refreshing impartially violets and salads, lilies and tall flowering onions, under the branches of the peach tree and the pomegranate, to where, in the shade of the great pink oleander tufts, it pours out below into the big tank, for the maids to rinse their linen in the evening, and the peasants to fill their cans to water the bedded-out tomatoes, and the potted clove-pinks in the shadow of the house.

The Blessed Virgin's garden is like that, where, as she prays in the cool of the evening, the gracious Gabriel flutters on to one knee (hushing the sound of his wings lest he startle her) through the pale green sky, the deep



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blue-green valley ; and you may still see in the Tuscan fields clumps of cypresses clipped wheel-shape, which might mark the very spot.

The transition from this orchard-garden, this *orto*, of the old Italian novelists and painters to the architectural garden of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is indicated in some of the descriptions and illustrations of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, a sort of hand-book of antiquities in the shape of a novel, written by Fra Francesco Colonna, and printed at Venice about 1480. Here we find trees and hedges treated as brick and stone work ; walls, niches, colonnades, cut out of ilex and laurel ; statues, vases, peacocks, clipped in box and yew ; moreover antiquities, busts, inscriptions, broken altars and triumphal arches, temples to the graces and Venus, stuck about the place very much as we find them in the Roman Villas of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But I doubt whether the *Hypnerotomachia* can be taken as evidence of the gardens of Colonna's own days. I think his descriptions are rather of what his archæological lore made him long for, and what came

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in time, when antiques were more plentiful than in the early Renaissance, and the monuments of the ancients could be incorporated freely into the gardens. For the classic Italian garden is essentially Roman in origin ; it could have arisen only on the top of ancient walls and baths, its shape suggested by the ruins below, its ornaments dug up in the planting of the trees ; and until the time of Julius II. and Leo X., Rome was still a mediæval city, feudal and turbulent, in whose outskirts, for ever overrun by baronial squabbles, no sane man would have built himself a garden ; and in whose ancient monuments castles were more to be expected than belvederes and orangeries. Indeed, by the side of quaint arches and temples, and labyrinths which look like designs for a box of toys, we find among the illustrations of Polifilo various charming woodcuts showing bits of vine trellis, of tank and of fountain, on the small scale, and in the domestic, quite unclassic style of the Italian burgher's garden. I do not mean to say that the gardens of Lorenzo dei Medici, of Catherine Cornaro near Asolo, of the Gonzagas near Mantua, of the Estensi at Scandiano and Sassuolo, were kitchen

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gardens like those of Isabella's basil pot. They had waterworks already, and aviaries full of costly birds, and enclosures where camels and giraffes were kept at vast expense, and parks with deer and fishponds; they were the gardens of the castle, of the farm, magnified and made magnificent, spread over a large extent of ground. But they were not, any more than are the gardens of Boiardo's and Ariosto's enchantresses (copied by Spenser) the typical Italian gardens of later days.

And here, having spoken of that rare and learned Hypnerotomachia Poliphili (which, by the way, any one who wishes to be instructed, sickened, and bored for many days together, may now read in Monsieur Claudius Popelin's French translation), it is well I should state that for the rest of this dissertation I have availed myself of neither the *British Museum*, nor the *National Library of Paris*, nor the *Library of South Kensington* (the italics seem necessary to show my appreciation of those haunts of learning), but merely of the light of my own poor intellect. For I do not think I care to read about gardens among foolscap and inkstains and printed forms; in fact I doubt

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## Old Italian Gardens

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whether I care to read about them at all, save in Boccaccio and Ariosto, Spenser and Tasso ; though I hope that my readers will be more literary characters than myself.

### II

The climate of Italy (moving on in my discourse) renders it difficult and almost impossible to have flowers growing in the ground all through the summer. After the magnificent efflorescence of May and June the soil cakes into the consistence of terra-cotta, and the sun, which has expanded and withered the roses and lilies with such marvellous rapidity, toasts everything like so much corn or maize. Very few herbaceous flowers—the faithful, friendly, cheerful zinnias, for instance—can continue blooming, and the oleander, become more brilliantly rose-colour with every additional week's drought, triumph over empty beds. Flowers in Italy are a crop like corn, hemp, or beans ; you must be satisfied with fallow soil when they are over. I say these things, learned by some bitter experience of flowerless summers, to explain why Italian flower-garden-

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ing mainly takes refuge in pots—from the great ornamented lemon-jars down to the pots of carnations, double geraniums, tuberoses, and jasmines on every wall, on every ledge or window-sill ; so much so, in fact, that even the famous sweet basil, and with it young Lorenzo's head, had to be planted in a pot. Now this poverty of flower-beds and richness of pots made it easy and natural for the Italian garden to become, like the Moorish one, a place of mere greenery and water, a palace whose fountains plashed in sunny yards walled in with myrtle and bay, in mysterious chambers roofed over with ilex and box.

And this it became. Moderately at first ; a few hedges of box and cypress—exhaling its resinous breath in the sunshine—leading up to the long, flat Tuscan house, with its tower or pillared loggia under the roof to take the air and dry linen ; a few quaintly cut trees set here and there, along with the twisted mulberry tree where the family drank its wine and ate its fruit of an evening ; a little grove of ilexes to the back, in whose shade you could sleep while the cicadas buzzed at noon ; some cypresses gathered together into a screen, just



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to separate the garden from the olive yard above ; gradually perhaps a balustrade set at the end of the bowling-green, that you might see, even from a distance, the shimmery blue valley below, the pale blue distant hills ; and if you had it, some antique statue not good enough for the courtyard of the town house, set on the balustrade or against the tree ; also, where water was plentiful, a little grotto, scooped out under that semicircular screen of cypresses. A very modest place, but differing essentially from the orchard and kitchen garden of the mediæval burgher ; and out of which came something immense and unique—the classic Roman villa.

For your new garden, your real Italian garden, brings in a new element—that of perspective, architecture, decoration ; the trees used as building material, the lie of the land as theatre arrangements, the water as the most docile and multiform stage property. Now think what would happen when such gardens begin to be made in Rome. The Popes and Popes' nephews can enclose vast tracts of land, expropriated by some fine sweeping fiscal injustice, or by the great expropriator, fever, in



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the outskirts of the town ; and there place their casino, at first a mere summer-house, whither to roll of spring evenings in stately coaches and breathe the air with a few friends ; then gradually a huge house, with its suits of guests' chambers, stables, chapel, orangery, collection of statues and pictures, its subsidiary smaller houses, belvederes, circuses, and what not ! And around the house His Eminence or His Serene Excellency may lay out his garden. Now go where you may in the outskirts of Rome you are sure to find ruins—great aqueduct arches, temples half-standing, gigantic terrace-works belonging to some baths or palace hidden beneath the earth and vegetation. Here you have naturally an element of architectural ground-plan and decoration which is easily followed : the terraces of quincunxes, the symmetrical groves, the long flights of steps, the triumphal arches, the big ponds, come, as it were, of themselves, obeying the order of what is below. And from underground, everywhere, issues a legion of statues, headless, armless, in all stages of mutilation, who are charitably mended, and take their place, mute sentinels, white and earth-stained, at every

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intersecting box hedge, under every ilex grove, beneath the cypresses of each sweeping hillside avenue, wherever a tree can make a niche or a bough a canopy. Also vases, sarcophagi, baths, little altars, columns, reliefs by the score and hundred, to be stuck about everywhere, let into every wall, clapped on the top of every gable, every fountain stacked up, in every empty space.

Among these inhabitants of the gardens of Cæsar, Lucullus, or Sallust, who, after a thousand years' sleep, pierce through the earth into new gardens, of crimson cardinals and purple princes, each fattened on his predecessors' spoils—Medici, Farnesi, Peretti, Aldobrandini, Ludovisi, Rospigliosi, Borghese, Pamphili—among this humble people of stone I would say a word of garden Hermes and their vicissitudes. There they stand, squeezing from out their triangular sheath the stout pectorals veined with rust, scarred with corruptions, under the ilexes, whose drip, drip, through all the rainy days and nights of those ancient times and these modern ones has gradually eaten away an eye here, a cheek there, making up for the loss by gilding the hair with lichens, and matting the beard with

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green ooze ; while patched chin, and restored nose, give them an odd look of fierce German duellists. Have they been busts of Cæsars, hastily ordered on the accession of some Tiberius or Nero, hastily sent to alter into Caligula or Galba, or chucked into the Tiber on to the top of the monster Emperor's body after that had been properly hauled through the streets ? Or are they philosophers, at your choice, Plato or Aristotle or Zeno or Epicurus, once presiding over the rolls of poetry and science in some noble's or some rhetor's library ? Or is it possible that this featureless block, smiling foolishly with its orbless eye-sockets and worn-out mouth, may have had, once upon a time, a nose from Phidias's hand, a pair of Cupid lips carved by Praxiteles ?

### III

A book of seventeenth-century prints—"The Gardens of Rome, with their plans raised and seen in perspective, drawn and engraved by Giov : Battista Falda, at the printing-house of Gio : Giacomo de' Rossi, at the sign of Paris, near the church of Peace in Rome"—brings

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home to one, with the names of the architects who laid them out, that these Roman villas are really a kind of architecture cut out of living instead of dead timber. To this new kind of architecture belongs a new kind of sculpture. The antiques do well in their niches of box and laurel under their canopy of hanging ilex boughs ; they are, in their weather-stained, mutilated condition, another sort of natural material fit for the artist's use ; but the old sculpture being thus in a way assimilated through the operation of earth, wind, and rain, into tree-trunks and mossy boulders, a new sculpture arises undertaking to make of marble something which will continue the impression of the trees and waters, wave its jagged outlines like the branches, twist its supple limbs like the fountains. It is high time that some one should stop the laughing and sniffing at this great sculpture, of Bernini and his Italian and French followers, the last spontaneous outcome of the art of the Renaissance, of the decorative sculpture which worked in union with place and light and surroundings. Mistaken as indoor decoration, as free statuary in the sense of the antique, this sculpture has after all

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given us the only works which are thoroughly right in the open air, among the waving trees, the mad vegetation which sprouts under the moist, warm Roman sky, from every inch of masonry and travertine. They are comic of course looked at in all the details, those angels who smirk and gesticulate with the emblems of the passion, those popes and saints who stick out colossal toes and print on the sky gigantic hands, on the parapets of bridges and the gables of churches ; but imagine them replaced by fine classic sculpture—stiff mannikins struggling with the overwhelming height, the crushing hugeness of all things Roman ; little tin soldiers lost in the sky instead of those gallant theatrical creatures swaggering among the clouds, pieces of wind-torn cloud, petrified for the occasion, themselves ! Think of Bernini's Apollo and Daphne, a group unfortunately kept in a palace room, with whose right angles its every outline swears, but which, if placed in a garden, would be the very summing up of all garden and park impressions in the waving, circling lines ; yet not without a niminy piminy restraint of the draperies, the limbs, the hair turning to clustered leaves, the



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body turning to smooth bark, of the flying nymph and the pursuing god.

The great creation of this Bernini school, which shows it as the sculpture born of gardens, is the fountain. No one till the seventeenth century had guessed what might be the relations of stone and water, each equally obedient to the artist's hand. The mediæval Italian fountain is a tank, a huge wash-tub fed from lions' mouths, as if by taps, and ornamented, more or less, with architectural and sculptured devices. In the Renaissance we get complicated works of art—Neptunes with tridents throne above sirens squeezing their breasts, and cupids riding on dolphins, like the beautiful fountain of Bologna ; or boys poised on one foot, holding up tortoises, like Rafael's *Tartarughe* of Piazza Mattei ; more elaborate devices still, like the one of the villa at Bagnaia, near Viterbo. But these fountains do equally well when dry, equally well translated into bronze or silver : they are wonderful salt-cellars or fruit-dishes ; everything is delightful except the water, which spurts in meagre threads as from a garden-hose. They are the fitting ornament of Florence, where there is



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pure drinking water only on Sundays and holidays, of Bologna, where there is never any at all.

The seventeenth century made a very different thing of its fountains—something as cool, as watery, as the jets which gurgle and splash in Moorish gardens and halls, and full of form and fancy withal, the water never alone, but accompanied by its watery suggestion of power and will and whim. They are so absolutely right, these Roman fountains of the Bernini school, that we are apt to take them as a matter of course, as if the horses had reared between the spurts from below and the gushes and trickles above; as if the Triton had been draped with the overflowing of his horn; as if the Moor with his turban, the Asiatic with his veiled fall, the solemn Egyptian river god, had basked and started back with the lion and the seahorse among the small cataracts breaking into foam in the pond, the sheets of water dropping, prefiguring icicles, lazily over the rocks, all stained black by the north winds and yellow by the lichen, all always, always, in those Roman gardens and squares, from the beginning of time, natural objects,

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perfect and not more to be wondered at than the water-encircled rocks of the mountains and seashores. Such art as this cannot be done justice to with the pen ; diagrams would be necessary, showing how in every case the lines of the sculpture harmonise subtly, or clash to be more subtly harmonised, with the movement, the immensely varied, absolutely spontaneous movement of the water ; the sculptor, become infinitely modest, willing to sacrifice his own work, to make it uninteresting in itself, as a result of the hours and days he must have spent watching the magnificent manners and exquisite tricks of natural waterfalls—nay, the mere bursting alongside of breakwaters, the jutting up between stones, of every trout-stream and milldam. It is not till we perceive its absence (in the fountains, for instance, of modern Paris) that we appreciate this Roman art of water sculpture. Meanwhile we accept the fountains as we accept the whole magnificent harmony of nature and art—nature tutored by art, art fostered by nature—of the Roman villas, undulating, with their fringe of pines and oaks, over the hillocks and dells of the Campagna, or stacked up proudly,

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vineyards and woods all round, on the steep sides of Alban and Sabine hills.

### IV

This book of engravings of the villas of the Serene Princes Aldobrandini, Pamphili, Borghese, and so forth, brings home to us another fact, to wit, that the original owners and layers-out thereof must have had but little enjoyment of them. There they go in their big coaches, among the immense bows and curtsies of the ladies and gentlemen and dapper ecclesiastics whom they meet; princes in feathers and laces, and cardinals in silk and ermine. But the delightful gardens on which they are being complimented are meanwhile mere dreadful little plantations, like a nurseryman's squares of cabbages, you would think, rather than groves of ilexes and cypresses, for, alas, the greatest princes, the most magnificent cardinals, cannot bribe Time, or hustle him to hurry up.

And thus the gardens were planted and grew. For whom? Certainly not for the men of those days, who would doubtless have

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been merely shocked could they have seen or foreseen. . . . For their ghosts perhaps? Scarcely. A friend of mine, in whose information on such matters I have implicit belief, assures me that it is not the *whole* ghosts of the ladies and cavaliers of long ago who haunt the gardens; not the ghost of their everyday, humdrum likeness to ourselves, but the ghost of certain moments of their existence, certain rustlings, and shimmerings of their personality, their waywardness, momentary, transcendent graces and graciousnesses, unaccountable wistfulness and sorrow, certain looks of the face and certain tones of the voice (perhaps none of the steadiest), things that seemed to die away into nothing on earth, but which have permeated their old haunts, clung to the statues with the ivy, risen and fallen with the plash of the fountains, and which now exhale in the breath of the honeysuckle and murmur in the voice of the birds, in the rustle of the leaves and the high, invading grasses. There are some verses of Verlaine's, which come to me always, on the melancholy minuet tune to which Monsieur Fauré has set them, as I walk in those Italian gardens, Roman and

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## Old Italian Gardens

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Florentine, walk in the spirit as well as in the flesh :

Votre âme est un paysage choisi  
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques  
Jouant du luth et quasi  
Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques.  
Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur  
L'amour vainqueur et la vie opportune,  
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur ;  
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,  
Au calme clair de lune triste et beau  
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres  
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,  
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.

### V

And this leads me to wonder what these gardens must be when the key has turned in their rusty gates, and the doorkeeper gone to sleep under the gun hanging from its nail. What must such places be, Mondragone, for instance, near Frascati, and the deserted Villa Pucci near Signa, during the great May nights, when my own small scrap of garden, not beyond kitchen sounds and servants' lamps, is made wonderful and magical by the scents which rise up, by the song of the nightingales,



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the dances of the fireflies, copying in the darkness below the figures which are footed by the nimble stars overhead. Into such rites as these, which the poetry of the past practises with the poetry of summer nights, one durst not penetrate, save after leaving one's vulgar flesh, one's habits, one's realities outside the gate.

And since I have mentioned gates, I must not forget one other sort of old Italian garden, perhaps the most poetical and pathetic—the garden that has ceased to exist. You meet it along every Italian highroad or country lane ; a piece of field, tender green with the short wheat in winter, brown and orange with the dried maize husks and seeding sorghum in summer, the wide grass path still telling of coaches that once rolled in ; a big stone bench, with sweeping shell-like back under the rosemary bushes ; and, facing the road, between solemnly grouped cypresses or stately marshalled poplars, a gate of charming hammered iron standing open between its scroll-work masonry and empty vases, under its covered escutcheon. The gate that leads to nowhere.



## ABOUT LEISURE



## ABOUT LEISURE

Sancte Hieronyme, ora pro nobis!

*Litany of the Saints.*

### I

HUNG in my room, in such a manner as to catch my eye on waking, is an excellent photograph of Bellini's *St. Jerome in his Study*. I am aware that it is not at all by Bellini, but by an inferior painter called Catena, and I am, therefore, careful not to like it very much. It occupies that conspicuous place not as a work of art but as an *aid to devotion*. For I have instituted in my mind, and quite apart from the orthodox cultus, a special devotion to St. Jerome as the Patron of Leisure.

And here let me forestall the cavillings of those who may object that Hieronymus, whom we call Jerome (born in Dalmatia and died at Bethlehem about 1500 years ago), was on the contrary a busy, even an overworked Father of

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the Church ; that he wrote three stout volumes of polemical treatises, besides many others (including the dispute “ concerning seraphs ”), translated the greater part of the Bible into Latin, edited many obscure texts, and, on the top of it all, kept up an active correspondence with seven or eight great ladies, a circumstance alone sufficient to prove that he could not have had much time to spare. I know. But all that either has nothing to do with it or serves to explain why St. Jerome was afterwards rewarded by the gift of Leisure, and is, therefore, to be invoked by all those who aspire at enjoying the same. For the painters of all schools, faithful to the higher truth, have agreed in telling us that : first, St. Jerome had a most delightful study, looking out on the finest scenery ; secondly, that he was never writing, but always reading or looking over the edge of his book at the charming tables and chairs and curiosities, or at the sea and mountains through the window ; and thirdly, *that he was never interrupted by anybody*. I underline this item, because on it, above all the others, is founded my certainty that St. Jerome is the only person who ever enjoyed

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perfect leisure, and, therefore, the natural patron and advocate of all the other persons to whom even imperfect leisure is refused. In what manner this miracle was compassed is exactly what I propose to discuss in this essay. An excellent *Roman Catholic* friend of mine, to whom I propounded the question, did indeed solve it by reminding me that Heaven had made St. Jerome a present of a lion who slept on his door-mat, after which, she thought, his leisure could take care of itself. But although this answer seems decisive, it really only begs the question; and we are obliged to inquire further into the *real nature of St. Jerome's lion*. This formula has a fine theological ring, calling to mind Hieronymus's own treatise, *Of the Nature of Seraphs*, and I am pleased to have found anything so suitable to the arrangements of a Father of the Church. Nevertheless, I propose to investigate into the subject of Leisure with a method rather human and earthly than in any way transcendental.



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### II

We must evidently begin by a little work of defining ; and this will be easiest done by considering first what Leisure is not. In the first place, it is one of those things about which we erroneously suppose that other people have plenty of it, and we ourselves have little or none, owing to our thoroughly realising only that which lies nearest to our eye—to wit, *ourselves*. How often do we not go into another person's room and say, " Ah ! *this* is a place where one can feel peaceful ! " How often do we not long to share the peacefulness of some old house, say in a deserted suburb, with its red fruit wall and its cedar half hiding the windows, or of some convent portico, with glimpses of spaliered orange trees. Meanwhile, in that swept and garnished spacious room, in that house or convent, is no peacefulness to share ; barely, perhaps, enough to make life's two ends meet. For we do not see what fills up, chokes and frets the life of others, whereas we are uncomfortably aware of the smallest encumbrance in our own ; in these matters we feel quickly enough the mote in our



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own eye, and do not perceive the beam in our neighbour's.

And leisure, like its sister, peace, is among those things which are internally felt rather than seen from the outside. (Having written this part of my definition, it strikes me that I have very nearly given away St. Jerome and St. Jerome's lion, since any one may say, that probably that famous leisure of his was just one of the delusions in question. But this is not the case. St. Jerome really had leisure, at least when he was painted ; I know it to be a fact ; and, for the purposes of literature, I require it to be one. So I close this parenthesis with the understanding that so much is absolutely settled.)

Leisure requires the evidence of our own feelings, because it is not so much a quality of time as a peculiar state of mind. We speak of *leisure time*, but what we really mean thereby is *time in which we can feel at leisure*. What being at leisure means is more easily felt than defined. It has nothing to do with being idle, or having time on one's hands, although it does involve a certain sense of free space about one, as we shall see anon. There is time and to spare in

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a lawyer's waiting-room, but there is no leisure, neither do we enjoy this blessing when we have to wait two or three hours at a railway junction. On both these occasions (for persons who can profit thereby to read the papers, to learn a verb, or to refresh memories of foreign travel, are distinctly abnormal) we do not feel in possession of ourselves. There is something fuming and raging inside us, something which seems to be kicking at our inner bulwarks as we kicked the cushions of a tardy four-wheeler in our childhood. St. Jerome, patron of leisure, never behaved like that, and his lion was always engrossed in pleasant contemplation of the cardinal's hat on the peg. I have said that when we are bored we feel as if possessed by something not quite ourselves (much as we feel possessed by a stone in a shoe, or a cold in the head); and this brings me to a main characteristic of leisure: it implies that we feel free to do what we like, and that we have plenty of space to do it in. This is a very important remark of mine, and if it seem trite, that is merely because it is so wonderfully true. Besides, it is fraught with unexpected consequences.

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### III

The worst enemy of leisure is boredom : it is one of the most active pests existing, fruitful of vanity and vexation of spirit. I do not speak merely of the wear and tear of so-called social amusements, though that is bad enough. We kill time, and kill our better powers also, as much in the work undertaken to keep off *ennui* as in the play. Count Tolstoi, with his terrible eye for shams, showed it all up in a famous answer to M. Dumas  *fils*. Many, many of us, work, he says, in order to escape from ourselves. Now, we should not want to escape from ourselves ; we ought to carry ourselves, the more unconsciously the better, along ever widening circles of interest and activity ; we should bring ourselves into ever closer contact with everything that is outside us ; we should be perpetually giving ourselves from sheer loving instinct ; but how can we give ourself if we have run away from it, or buried it at home, or chained it up in a treadmill ? Good work is born of the love of the Power-to-do for the Job-to-be-done ; nor can any sort of chemical arrangements,

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like those by which Faust's pupil made *Homunculus* in his retort, produce genuinely living, and in its turn fruitful, work. The fear of boredom, the fear of the moral going to bits which boredom involves, encumbers the world with rubbish, and exhibitions of pictures, publishers' announcements, lecture syllabuses, schemes of charitable societies, are pattern-books of such litter. The world, for many people, and unfortunately, for the finer and nobler (those most afraid of *ennui*) is like a painter's garret, where some half-daubed canvas, eleven feet by five, hides the *Jaconda* on the wall, the *Venus* in the corner, and blocks the charming tree-tops, gables, and distant meadows through the window.

Art, literature, and philanthropy are notoriously expressions no longer of men's and women's thoughts and feelings, but of their dread of finding themselves without thoughts to think or feelings to feel. So-called practical persons know this, and despise such employments as frivolous and effeminate. But are they not also, to a great extent, frightened of themselves and running away from boredom? See your well-to-do weighty man of

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forty-five or fifty, merchant, or soldier, or civil servant ; the same who thanks God *he* is no idler. Does he really require more money ? Is he more really useful as a colonel than as a major, in a wig or cocked hat than out of it ? Is he not shuffling money from one heap into another, making rules and regulations for others to unmake, preparing for future restless idlers the only useful work which restless idleness can do, the carting away of their predecessor's litter ?

Nor is this all the mischief. Work undertaken to kill time, at best to safeguard one's dignity, is clearly not the work which one was born to, since that would have required no such incentives. Now, trying to do work one is not fit for, implies the more or less unfitting oneself to do, or even to be, the something for which one had facilities. It means competing with those who are utterly different, competing in things which want a totally different kind of organism ; it means, therefore, offering one's arms and legs, and feelings and thoughts to those blind, brutal forces of adaptation which, having to fit a human character into a given place, lengthen and



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shorten it, mangling it unconcernedly in the process.

Say one was naturally adventurous, a creature for open air and quick, original resolves. Is he the better for a deliberative, sedentary business, or it for him? There are people whose thought poises on distant points, swirls and pounces, and gets the prey which can't be got by stalking along the bushes; there are those who, like divers, require to move head downwards, feet in the air, an absurd position for going up hill. There are people who must not feel æsthetically, in order (so Dr. Bain assures us) that they may be thorough-paced, scientific thinkers; others who cannot get half a page or fifty dates by heart because they assimilate and alter everything they take in.

And think of the persons born to contemplation or sympathy, who, in the effort to be prompt and practical, in the struggle for a fortune or a visiting-list lose, atrophy (alas, after so much cruel bruising!) their inborn exquisite powers.

The world wants useful inhabitants. True. But the clouds building bridges over the sea, the storms modelling the peaks and flanks of



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the mountains, are a part of the world ; and they want creatures to sit and look at them and learn their life's secrets, and carry them away, conveyed perhaps merely in altered tone of voice, or brightened colour of eye, to revive the spiritual and physical hewers of wood and drawers of water. For the poor sons and daughters of men require for sustenance, as well as food and fuel, and intellect and morals, the special mysterious commodity called *charm*. . . .

### IV

And here let me open a parenthesis of lamentation over the ruthless manner in which our century and nation destroys this precious thing, even in its root and seed. *Charm* is, where it exists, an intrinsic and ultimate quality ; it makes our actions, persons, life, significant and desirable, apart from anything they may lead to, or any use to which they can be put. Now we are allowing ourselves to get into a state where nothing is valued, otherwise than as a means ; where to-day is interesting only because it leads up to to-morrow ; and the flower is valued only on account of the

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fruit, and the fruit, in its turn, on account of the seed.

It began, perhaps, with the loss of that sacramental view of life and life's details which belonged to Judaism and the classic religions, and of which even Catholicism has retained a share; making eating, drinking, sleeping, cleaning house and person, let alone marriage, birth, and death, into something grave and meaningful, not merely animal and accidental; and mapping out the years into days, each with its symbolic or commemorative meaning and emotion. All this went long ago, and inevitably. But we are losing nowadays something analogous and more important: the cultivation and sanctification not merely of acts and occasions but of the individual character.

Life has been allowed to arrange itself, if such can be called arrangement, into an unstable, jostling heap of interests, ours and other folk's, serious and vacuous, trusted to settle themselves according to the line of least resistance (that is, of most breakage!) and the survival of the toughest, without our sympathy directing the choice. As the days of the year

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have become confused, hurried, and largely filled with worthless toil and unworthy trouble, so in a measure, alas, our souls ! We rarely envy people for being delightful ; we are always ashamed of mentioning that any of our friends are virtuous ; we state what they have done, or do, or are attempting ; we state their chances of success. Yet success may depend, and often does, on greater hurrying and jostling, not on finer material and workmanship, in our hurrying times. The quick method, the rapid worker, the cheap object quickly replaced by a cheaper—these we honour ; we want the last new thing, and have no time to get to love our properties, bodily and spiritual. 'Tis bad economy, we think, to weave such damask, linen, and brocade as our fathers have left us ; and perhaps this reason accounts for our love of *bric-à-brac* ; we wish to buy associations ready made, like that wealthy man of taste who sought to buy a half-dozen old statues, properly battered and lichened by the centuries, to put in his brand new garden. With this is connected—I mean this indifference to what folk *are* as distinguished from what they *do*—the self-assertion and

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aggressiveness of many worthy persons, men more than women, and gifted, alas, more than giftless ; the special powers proportionately accompanied by special odiousness. Such persons cultivate themselves, indeed, but as fruit and vegetables for the market, and, with good luck and trouble, possibly *primeurs* : concentrate every means, chemical manure and sunshine, and quick ! each still hard pear or greenish cauliflower into the packing-case, the shavings and sawdust, for export. It is with such well-endowed persons that originates the terrible mania (caught by their neighbours) of tangible work, something which can be put alongside of others' tangible work, if possible with some visible social number attached to it. So long as this be placed on the stall where it courts inspection, what matter how empty and exhausted the soul which has grown it ? For nobody looks at souls except those who use them for this market-gardening.

Dropping metaphor ; it is woeful to see so many fine qualities sacrificed to *getting on*, independent of actual necessity ; getting on, no matter why, on to the road *to no matter what*. And on that road, what bitterness and fury

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if another passes in front ! Take up books of science, of history and criticism, let alone newspapers ; half the space is taken up in explaining (or forestalling explanations), that the sage, hero, poet, artist said, did, or made the particular thing [before] some other sage, hero, poet, artist ; and that what the other did, or said, or made, was either a bungle, or a plagiarism, or—worst of all—was something *obvious*. Hence, like the bare-back riders at the Siena races, illustrious persons, and would-be illustrious, may be watched using their energies, not merely in pressing forward, but in hitting competitors out of the way with inflated bladders—bladders filled with the wind of conceit, not merely the breath of the lungs. People who might have been modest and gentle, grow, merely from self-defence, arrogant and aggressive ; they become waspish, contradictory, unfair, who were born to be wise and just, and well-mannered. And to return to the question of *Charm*, they lose, soil, maim in this scuffle, much of this most valuable possession ; their intimate essential quality, their natural manner of being towards nature and neighbours and ideas ; their individual



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shape, perfume, savour, and, in the sense of herbals, their individual *virtue*. And when, sometimes, one comes across some of it remaining, it is with the saddened feeling of finding a delicate plant trampled by cattle or half eaten up by goats.

Alas, alas, for charm! People are busy painting pictures, writing poems, and making music all the world over, and busy making money for the buying or hiring thereof. But as to that charm of character which is worth all the music and poetry and pictures put together, how the good common-sense generations do waste it.

### V

Now I suspect that *Charm* is closely related to *Leisure*. Charm is a living harmony in the individual soul. It is organised internally, the expression of mere inborn needs, the offspring of free choice; and as it is the great giver of pleasure to others, sprung probably from pleasure within ourselves; making life seem easier, more flexible, even as life feels in so far easier and more flexible to those who have it.



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Now even the best work means struggle, if not with the world and oneself, at least with difficulties inanimate and animate, pressure and resistance which make the individual soul stronger, but also harder and less flowerlike, and often a trifle warped by inevitable routine. Hence Charm is not the nursling of our hours of work, but the delicate and capricious foster-child of Leisure. For, as observed, Leisure suspends the pull and push, the rough-and-ready reciprocity of man and circumstance. 'Tis in leisure that the soul is free to grow by its own laws, grow inwardly organised and harmonious ; its fine individual hierarchism to form feelings and thoughts, each taking rank and motion under a conscious headship. 'Tis, I would show, in leisure, while talking with the persons who are dear, while musing on the themes that are dearer even than they, that voices learn their harmonious modes, intonation, accent, pronunciation of single words; all somehow falling into characteristic pattern, and the features of the face learn to move with that centred meaning which oftentimes makes homeliness itself more radiant than beauty. Nay more, may it not be in Leisure, during

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life's pauses, that we learn to live, what for and how ?

### VI

*Life's Pauses.* We think of Leisure in those terms, comparing it with the scramble, at best the bustle, of work. But this might be a delusion, like that of the moving shore and the motionless boat. St. Jerome, our dear patron of Leisure, is looking dreamily over the top of his desk, listening to the larks outside the wide window, watching the white sailing clouds. Is he less alive than if his eyes were glued to the page, his thoughts focussed on one topic, his pen going scratch-scratch, his soul oblivious of itself ? He might be writing fine words, thinking fine thoughts ; but would he have had fine thoughts to think, fine words to write, if he had always been busy thinking and writing, and had kept company not with the larks and the clouds and the dear lion on the mat, but only with the scratching pen ?

For, when all is said and done, 'tis during work we spend, during leisure we amass those

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qualities which we barter for ever with other folk, and the act of barter is *life*. Anyhow, metaphysics apart, and to return to St. Jerome. This much is clear, that if Leisure were not a very good thing, this dear old saint would never have been made its heavenly patron.

But your discourse, declares the stern reader or he of sicklier conscience, might be a masked apology for idleness; and pray how many people would work in this world if every one insisted on having Leisure? The question, moralising friend, contains its own answer: if every one insisted on a share of Leisure, every one also would do a share of work. For as things stand, 'tis the superfluity of one man which makes the poverty of the other. And who knows? The realisation that Leisure is a good thing, a thing which every one must have, may, before very long, set many an idle man digging his garden and grooming his horses, many an idle woman cooking her dinner and rubbing her furniture. Not merely because one half of the world (the larger) will have recognised that work from morning to night is not in any sense living; but also

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because the other half may have learned (perhaps through grumbling experience) that doing nothing all day long, incidentally consuming or spoiling the work of others, is not *living* either. The recognition of the necessity of Leisure, believe me, will imply the recognition of the necessity of work, as its moral—I might say its *hygienic*, as much as its economic, co-relative.

For Leisure (and the ignorance of this truth is at the bottom of much *ennui*)—Leisure implies a superabundance not only of time but of the energy needed to spend time pleasantly. And it takes the finest activity to be truly at Leisure. Since Being at Leisure is but a name for being active from an inner impulse instead of a necessity; moving like a dancer or skater for the sake of one's inner rhythm instead of moving, like a ploughman or an errand-boy, for the sake of the wages you get for it. Indeed, for this reason, the type of all Leisure is *art*.

But this is an intricate question, and time, alas! presses. We must break off this leisurely talk, and betake ourselves each to his business—let us hope not to his treadmill! And, as we

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do so, the more to enjoy our work if luckily useful, the less to detest it if, alas ! as so often in our days, useless ; let us invoke the good old greybeard, painted enjoying himself between his lion and his quail in the wide-windowed study ; and, wishing for leisure, invoke its patron. Give us spare time, Holy Jerome, and joyful energy to use it. Sancte Hieronyme, ora pro nobis !





# RAVENNA AND HER GHOSTS



## RAVENNA AND HER GHOSTS

My oldest impression of Ravenna, before it became in my eyes the abode of living friends as well as of outlandish ghosts, is of a melancholy spring sunset at Classe.

Classe, which Dante and Boccaccio call in less Latin fashion Chiassi, is the place where of old the fleet (*classis*) of the Romans and Ostrogoths rode at anchor in the Adriatic. And Boccaccio says that it is (but I think he over-calculates) at three miles distance from Ravenna. It is represented in the mosaic of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, dating from the reign of Theodoric, by a fine city wall of gold *tesserae* (facing the representation of Theodoric's town palace with the looped-up embroidered curtains) and a strip of ultramarine sea, with two rowing-boats and one white blown-out sail upon it. Ravenna, which is now an inland town, was at that time built in a lagoon; and we must picture Classe in much

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the same relation to it that Malamocco or the Port of Lido is to Venice, the open sea-harbour, where big ships and flotillas were stationed, while smaller craft wound through the channels and sand-banks up to the city. But now the lagoon has dried up, the Adriatic has receded, and there remains of Classis not a stone, save, in the midst of stagnant canals, rice marsh and brown bogland, a gaunt and desolate church, with a ruinous mildewed house and a crevassed round tower by its side.

It seemed to me that first time, and has ever since seemed, no Christian church, but the temple of the great Roman goddess Fever. The gates stood open, as they do all day lest inner damp consume the building, and a beam from the low sun slanted across the oozy brown nave and struck a round spot of glittering green on the mosaic of the apse. There, in the half dome, stood rows and rows of lambs, each with its little tree and lilies, shining out white from the brilliant green grass of Paradise, great streams of gold and blue circling around them, and widening overhead into lakes of peacock splendour. The slanting sunbeam which burnished that



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spot of green and gold and brown mosaic, fell also across the altar steps, brown and green in their wet mildew like the ceiling above. The floor of the church, sunk below the level of the road, was as a piece of boggy ground leaving the feet damp, and breathing a clammy horror on the air. Outside the sun was setting behind a bank of solid grey clouds, faintly reddening their rifts and sending a few rose-coloured streaks into the pure yellow evening sky. Against that sky stood out the long russet line, the delicate cupolaed silhouette of the sear pinewood recently blasted by frost. While, on the other side, the marsh stretched out beyond sight, confused in the distance with grey clouds its lines of bare spectral poplars picked out upon its green and the greyness of the sky. All round the church lay brown grass, livid pools, green rice-fields covered with clear water reflecting the red sunset streaks; and overhead, driven by storm from the sea, the white gulls, ghosts you might think, of the white-sailed galleys of Theodoric, still haunting the harbour of Classis.

Since then, as I hinted, Ravenna has become

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the home of dear friends, to which I periodically return, in autumn or winter or blazing summer, without taking thought for any of the ghosts. And the impressions of Ravenna are mainly those of life; the voices of children, the plans of farmers, the squabbles of local politics. I am waked in the morning by the noises of the market; and opening my shutters, look down upon green umbrellas and awnings spread over baskets of fruit and vegetables, and heaps of ironware and stalls of coloured stuffs and gaudy kerchiefs. The streets are by no means empty. A steam tramcar puffs slowly along the widest of them; and, in the narrower, you have perpetually to squeeze against a house to make room for a clattering pony-cart, a jingling carriage, or one of those splendid bullock-waggon, shaped like an old-fashioned cannon-cart with spokeless wheels and metal studdings. There are no mediæval churches in Ravenna, and very few mediæval houses. The older palaces, though practically fortified, have a vague look of Roman villas; and the whole town is painted a delicate rose and apricot colour, which, particularly if you have come from the sad-

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coloured cities of Tuscany, gives it a Venetian, and (if I may say so) chintz-petticoat flowered-kerchief cheerfulness. And the life of the people, when you come in contact with it, also leaves an impression of provincial, rustic bustle. The Romagnas are full of crude socialism. The change from rice to wheat-growing has produced agricultural discontent; and conspiracy has been in the blood of these people, ever since Dante answered the Romagnolo Guido that his country would never have peace in its heart. The ghosts of Byzantine emperors and exarchs, of Gothic kings and mediæval tyrants must be laid, one would think, by socialist meetings and electioneering squabbles; and perhaps by another movement, as modern and as revolutionary, which also centres in this big historical village, the reclaiming of marshland, which may bring about changes in mode of living and thinking such as Socialism can never effect; nay, for all one knows, changes in climate, in sea and wind and clouds. *Bonification*, reclaiming, that is the great word in Ravenna; and I had scarcely arrived last autumn, before I found myself whirled off, among dog-carts and

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*chars-à-bancs*, to view reclaimed land in the cloudless, pale blue, ice-cold weather. On we trotted, with a great consulting of maps and discussing of expenses and production, through the flat green fields and meadows marked with haystacks; and jolted along a deep sandy track, all that remains of the Roméa, the pilgrims' way from Venice to Rome, where marsh and pool begin to interrupt the well-kept pastures, and the line of pine woods to come nearer and nearer. Over the fields, the frequent canals, and hidden ponds, circled gulls and wild fowl; and at every farm there was a little crowd of pony-carts and of gaitered sportsmen returning from the marshes. A sense of reality, of the present, of useful, bread-giving, fever-curing activity came by sympathy, as I listened to the chatter of my friends, and saw field after field, farm after farm, pointed out where, but a while ago, only swamp grass and bushes grew, and cranes and wild duck nested. In ten, twenty, fifty years, they went on calculating, Ravenna will be able to diminish by so much the town-rates; the Romagnas will be able to support so many more thousands of inhabitants; and that



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merely by employing the rivers to deposit arable soil torn from the mountain valleys ; the rivers—Po and his followers, as Dante called them—which have so long turned this country into marsh ; the rivers which, in a thousand years, cut off Ravenna from her sea.

We turned towards home, greedy for tea, and mightily in conceit with progress. But before us, at a turn of the road, appeared Ravenna, its towers and cupolas against a bank of clouds, a piled-up heap of sunset fire ; its canal, barred with flame, leading into its black vagueness, a spectre city. And there, to the left, among the bare trees, loomed the great round tomb of Theodoric. We jingled on, silent and overcome by the deathly December chill.

That is the odd thing about Ravenna. It is, more than any of the Tuscan towns, more than most of the Lombard ones, modern, and full of rough, dull, modern life ; and the past which haunts it comes from so far off, from a world with which we have no contact. Those pillared basilicas, which look like modern village churches from the street, affect one with their almost Moorish arches, their enamelled splendour of ultramarine, russet, sea-green and

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gold mosaics, their lily fields and peacock's tails in mosque-like domes, as great stranded hulks, come floating across Eastern seas and drifted ashore among the marsh and rice-field. The grapes and ivy berries, the pouting pigeons, the palm-trees and pecking peacocks, all this early symbolism with its association of Bacchic, Eleusinian mysteries, seems, quite as much as the actual fragments of Grecian capitals, the discs and gratings of porphyry and alabaster, so much flotsam and jetsam cast up from the shipwreck of an older Antiquity than Rome's; remnants of early Hellas, of Ionia, perhaps of Tyre.

I used to feel this particularly in Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, or, as it is usually called, *Classe dentro*, the long basilica built by Theodoric, outrivalled later by Justinian's octagon church of Saint Vitalis. There is something extremely Hellenic in feeling (however un-Grecian in form) in the pearly fairness of the delicate silvery white columns and capitals; in the gleam of white, on golden ground, and reticulated with jewels and embroideries, of the long band of mosaic virgins and martyrs running above them. The virgins, with their



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Byzantine names—Sancta Anastasia, Sancta Anatolia, Sancta Eulalia, Sancta Euphemia—have big kohled eyes and embroidered garments fantastically suggesting some Eastern hieratic dancing-girl; but they follow each other, in single file (each with her lily or rose-bush sprouting from the gauze, green mosaic), with erect, slightly balanced gait like the maidens of the Panathenaic procession, carrying, one would say, votive offerings to the altar, rather than crowns of martyrdom; all stately, sedate, as if drilled by some priestly ballet-master, all with the same wide eyes and set smile as of early Greek sculpture. There is no attempt to distinguish one from the other. There are no gaping wounds, tragic attitudes, wheels, swords, pincers or other attributes of martyrdom. And the male saints on the wall opposite are equally unlike mediæval Sebastians and Laurences, going, one behind the other, in shining white togas, to present their crowns to Christ on His throne. Christ also, in this Byzantine art, is never the Saviour. He sits, an angel on each side, on His golden seat, clad in purple and sandalled with gold, serene, beard-

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less, wide-eyed like some distant descendant of the Olympic Jove with his mantle of purple and gold.

This church of Saint Apollinaris contains a chapel specially dedicated to the saint, which sums up that curious impression of Hellenic pre-Christian cheerfulness. It is encrusted with porphyry and *giallo antico*, framed with delicate carved ivy wreaths along the sides, and railed in with an exquisite piece of alabaster openwork of vines and grapes, as on an antique altar. And in a corner of this little temple, which seems to be waiting for some painter enamoured of Greece and marble, stands the episcopal seat of the patron saint of the church, the saint who took his name from Apollo; an alabaster seat, wide-curved and delicate, in whose back you expect to find, so striking is the resemblance, the relief of dancing satyrs of the chair of the Priest of Dionysus.

As I was sitting one morning, as was my wont, in Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, which (like all Ravenna churches) is always empty, a woman came in, with a woollen shawl over her head, who, after hunting anxiously about, asked me where she would find the parish priest. "It

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is," she said, "for the Madonna's milk. My husband is a labourer out of work, he has been ill, and the worry of it all has made me unable to nurse my little baby. I want the priest, to ask him to get the Madonna to give me back my milk." I thought, as I listened to the poor creature, that there was but little hope of motherly sympathy from that Byzantine Madonna in purple and gold mosaic magnificence, seated ceremoniously on her throne like an antique Cybele.

Little by little one returns to one's first impression, and recognises that this thriving little provincial town, with its socialism and its *bonification* is after all a nest of ghosts, and little better than the churchyard of centuries.

Never, surely, did a town contain so many coffins, or at least thrust coffins more upon one's notice. The coffins are stone, immense oblong boxes, with massive sloping lids horned at each corner, or trough-like things with delicate sea-wave patternings, figures of toga'd saints and devices of palm-trees, peacocks, and doves, the carving made clearer by a picking out of bright green damp. They stand about in all the churches, not walled

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in, but quite free in the aisles, the chapels, and even close to the door. Most of them are doubtless of the fifth or sixth century, others perhaps barbarous or mediæval imitations; but they all equally belong to the ages in general, including our own, not curiosities or heirlooms, but serviceable furniture, into which generations have been put, and out of which generations have been turned to make room for later comers. It strikes one as curious at first to see, for instance, the date 1826 on a sarcophagus probably made under Theodoric or the Exarchs, but that merely means that a particular gentleman of Ravenna began that year his lease of entombment. They have passed from hand to hand (or, more properly speaking, from corpse to corpse) not merely by being occasionally discovered in digging foundations, but by inheritance, and frequently by sale. My friends possess a stone coffin, and the receipt from its previous owner. The transaction took place some fifty years ago; a name (they are cut very lightly) changed, a slab or coat-of-arms placed with the sarcophagus in a different church or chapel, a deed before the notary—that was



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all. What became of the previous tenant ? Once at least he surprised posterity very much ; perhaps it was in the case of that very purchase for which my friends still keep the bill. I know not ; but the stone-mason of the house used to relate that, some forty years ago, he was called in to open a stone coffin ; when, the immense horned lid having been rolled off, there was seen, lying in the sarcophagus, a man in complete armour, his sword by his side and vizor up, who, as they cried out in astonishment, instantly fell to dust. Was he an Ostrogothic knight, some Gunther or Volker turned Roman senator, or perhaps a companion of Guido da Polenta, a messmate of Dante, a playfellow of Francesca ?

Coffins being thus plentiful, their occupants (like this unknown warrior) have played considerable part in the gossip of Ravenna. It is well known, for instance, that Galla Placidia, daughter of Theodosius, sister of Arcadius and Honorius, and wife to a Visigothic king, sat for centuries enthroned (after a few years of the strangest adventures) erect, inside the alabaster coffin, formerly plated with gold, in the wonderful little blue mosaic chapel



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which bears her name. You could see her through a hole, quite plainly ; until, three centuries ago, some inquisitive boys thrust in a candle, and burned Theodosius's daughter to ashes. Dante also is buried under a little cupola at the corner of a certain street, and there was, for many years, a strange doubt about his bones. Had they been mislaid, stolen, mixed up with those of ordinary mortals? The whole thing was shrouded in mystery. That street corner where Dante lies, a remote corner under the wing of a church, resembled, until it was modernised and surrounded by gratings, and filled with garlands and inscriptions to Mazzini, nothing so much as the corner of Dis where Dante himself found Farinata and Cavalcante. It is crowded with stone coffins ; and, passing there in the twilight, one might expect to see flames upheaving their lids, and the elbows and shoulders of imprisoned followers of Epicurus.

Only once, so far as I know, have the inhabitants of Ravenna, Byzantine, mediæval, or modern, wasted a coffin ; but one is very glad of that once. I am speaking of a Roman sarcophagus, on which you can still trace the

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outlines of garlands, which stands turned into a cattle trough, behind the solitary farm in the depth of the forest of St. Vitalis. Round it the grass is covered in summer by the creeping tendrils of the white clematis ; and, in winter, the great thorn bushes and barberries and oaks blaze out crimson and scarlet and golden. The big, long-horned, grey cows pass to and fro to be milked ; and the shaggy ponies who haunt the pine wood come there to drink. It is better than housing no matter how many generations, jurisconsults, knights, monks, tyrants and persons of quality, among the damp and the stale incense of a church !

Enough of coffins ! There are live things at Ravenna and near Ravenna ; amongst others, though few people realise its presence, there is the sea.

It was on the day of the fish auction that I first went there. In the tiny port by the pier (for Ravenna has now no harbour) they were making an incredible din over the emptyings of the nets ; pretty, mottled, metallic fish, and slimy octopuses and sepias and flounders, looking like pieces of sea-mud. The fishing-boats, mostly from the Venetian lagoon, were

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moored along the pier, wide-bowed things, with eyes in the prow like the ships of Ulysses ; and bigger craft, with little castles and weather-vanes and saints' images and penons on the masts like the galleys of St. Ursula as painted by Carpaccio ; but all with the splendid orange sail, patched with suns, lions, and coloured stripes, of the Northern Adriatic. The fishermen from Chioggia, their heads covered with the high scarlet cap of the fifteenth century, were yelling at the fishmongers from town ; and all round lounged artillerymen in their white undress and yellow straps, who are encamped for practice on the sands, and whose carts and guns we had met rattling along the sandy road through the marsh.

On the pier we were met by an old man, very shabby and unshaven, who had been the priest for many years, with a salary of twelve pounds a year, of Sta. Maria in Porto Fuori, a little Gothic church in the marsh, where he had discovered and rubbed slowly into existence (it took him two months and heaven knows how many pennyworths of bread !) some valuable Giottesque frescoes. He was now chaplain of the harbour, and had turned his mind to

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maritime inventions, designing lighthouses, and shooting dolphins to make oil of their blubber. A kind old man, but with the odd brightness of a creature who has lived for years amid solitude and fever; a fit companion for the haggard saints whom he brought, one by one, in robes of glory and golden halos, to life again in his forlorn little church.

While we were looking out at the sea, where a little flotilla of yellow and cinnamon sails sat on the blue of the view-line like parrots on a rail, the sun had begun to set, a crimson ball, over the fringe of pine woods. We turned to go. Over the town, the place whence presently will emerge the slanting towers of Ravenna, the sky had become a brilliant, melancholy slate-blue; and apparently out of its depths, in the early twilight, flowed the wide canal between its dim banks fringed with tamarisk. No tree, no rock, or house was reflected in the jade-coloured water, only the uniform shadow of the bank made a dark, narrow band alongside its glassiness. It flows on towards the invisible sea, whose yellow sails overtop the grey marshland. In thick smooth strands of curdled water it



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flows lilac, pale pink, opalescent according to the sky above, reflecting nothing besides, save at long intervals the spectral spars and spider-like tissue of some triangular fishing-net ; a wan and delicate Lethe, issuing, you would say, out of a far-gone past into the sands and the almost tideless sea.

Other places become solemn, sad, or merely beautiful at sunset. But Ravenna, it seems to me, grows actually ghostly ; the Past takes it back at that moment, and the ghosts return to the surface.

For it is, after all, a nest of ghosts. They hang about all those silent, damp churches ; invisible, or at most tantalising one with a sudden gleam which may, after all, be only that of the mosaics, an uncertain outline which, when you near it, is after all only a pale grey column. But one feels their breathing all round. They are legion, but I do not know who they are. I only know that they are white, luminous, with gold embroideries to their robes, and wide, painted eyes, and that they are silent. The good citizens of Ravenna, in the comfortable eighteenth century, filled the churches with wooden pews, convenient,



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genteel in line and colour, with their names and coats-of-arms in full on the backs. But the ghosts took no notice of this measure; and there they are, even among these pews themselves.

Bishops and Exarchs, and jewelled Empresses, and half Oriental Autocrats, saints and be-dizened court-ladies, and barbarian guards and wicked chamberlains; I know not what they are. Only one of the ghosts takes a shape I can distinguish, and a name I am certain of. It is not Justinian or Theodora, who stare goggle-eyed from their mosaic in San Vitale mere wretched historic realities; *they* cannot haunt. The spectre I speak of is Theodoric. His tomb is still standing, outside the town in an orchard; a great round tower, with a circular roof made (heaven knows how) of one huge slab of Istrian stone, horned at the sides like the sarcophagi, or vaguely like a Viking's cap. The ashes of the great king have long been dispersed, for he was an Arian heretic. But the tomb remains, intact, a thing which neither time nor earthquake can dismantle.

In the town they show a piece of masonry,

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the remains of a doorway, and a delicate, pillared window, built on to a modern house, which is identified (but wrongly I am told) as Theodoric's palace, by its resemblance to the golden palace with the looped-up curtains on the mosaic of the neighbouring church. Into the wall of this building is built a great Roman porphyry bath, with rings carved on it, to which time has adjusted a lid of brilliant green lichen. There is no more. But Theodoric still haunts Ravenna. I have always, ever since I have known the town, been anxious to know more about Theodoric, but the accounts are jejune, prosaic, not at all answering to what that great king, who took his place with Attila and Sigurd in the great Northern epic, must have been. Historians represent him generally as a sort of superior barbarian, trying to assimilate and save the civilisation he was bound to destroy; an Ostrogothic king trying to be a Roman emperor; a military organiser and bureaucrat, exchanging his birthright of Valhalla for heaven knows what aulic red-tape miseries. But that is unsatisfactory. The real man, the Berserker trying to tame himself into the

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Cæsar of a fallen, shrunken Rome, seems to come out in the legend of his remorse and visions, pursued by the ghosts of Boetius and Symmachus, the wise men he had slain in his madness.

He haunts Ravenna, striding along the aisles of her basilicas, riding under the high moon along the dykes of her marshes, surrounded by white-stoled Romans, and Roman ensigns with eagles and crosses; but clad, as the Gothic brass-worker of Innsbruck has shown him, in no Roman lappets and breastplate, but in full mail, with beaked steel shoes and steel gorget, his big sword drawn, his vizor down, mysterious, the Dietrich of the Nibelungenlied, Theodoric King of the Goths.

These are the ghosts that haunt Ravenna, the true ghosts haunting only for such as can know their presence. But Ravenna, almost alone among Italian cities, possesses moreover a complete ghost-story of the most perfect type and highest antiquity, which has gone round the world and become known to all people. Boccaccio wrote it in prose; Dryden re-wrote it in verse; Botticelli illustrated it; and Byron summed up its quality in one of his most

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sympathetic passages. After this, to re-tell it were useless, had I not chanced to obtain, in a manner I am not at liberty to divulge, another version, arisen in Ravenna itself, and written, most evidently, in fullest knowledge of the case. Its language is the barbarous Romagnol dialect of the early fifteenth century, and it lacks all the Tuscan graces of the Decameron. But it possesses a certain air of truthfulness, suggesting that it was written by some one who had heard the facts from those who believed in them, and who believed in them himself; and I am therefore decided to give it, turned into English.

### THE LEGEND

About that time (when Messer Guido da Pollenta was lord of Ravenna) men spoke not a little of what happened to Messer Nastasio de Honestis, son of Messer Brunoro, in the forest of Classis. Now the forest of Classis is exceeding vast, extending along the sea-shore between Ravenna and Cervia for the space of some fifteen miles, and has its beginning near the church of Saint Apollinaris, which is in



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the marsh ; and you reach it directly from the gate of the same name, but also, crossing the River Ronco where it is easier to ford, by the gate called Sisa, beyond the houses of the Rasponis. And this forest aforesaid is made of many kinds of noble and useful trees, to wit, oaks, both free standing and in bushes, ilexes, elms, poplars, bays, and many plants of smaller growth but great dignity and pleasantness, as hawthorns, barberries, blackthorn, blackberry, brier-rose, and the thorn called marrucca, which bears pods resembling small hats or cymbals, and is excellent for hedging. But principally does this noble forest consist of pine-trees, exceeding lofty and perpetually green ; whence indeed the arms of this ancient city, formerly the seat of the Emperors of Rome, are none other than a green pine-tree.

And the forest aforesaid is well stocked with animals, both such as run and creep, and many birds. The animals are foxes, badgers, hares, rabbits, ferrets, squirrels, and wild boars, the which issue forth and eat the young crops and grub the fields with incredible damage to all concerned. Of the birds it would be too long to speak, both of those which are snared,



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shot with cross-bows, or hunted with the falcon; and they feed off fish in the ponds and streams of the forest, and grasses and berries, and the pods of the white vine (clematis) which covers the grass on all sides. And the manner of Messer Nastasio being in the forest was thus, he being at the time a youth of twenty years or thereabouts, of illustrious birth, and comely person and learning and prowess, and modest and discreet bearing. For it so happened that, being enamoured of the daughter of Messer Hostasio de Traversariis, the damsel, who was lovely, but exceeding coy and shrewish, would not consent to marry him, despite the desire of her parents, who in everything, as happens with only daughters of old men (for Messer Hostasio was well stricken in years), sought only to please her. Whereupon Messer Nastasio, fearing lest the damsel might despise his fortunes, wasted his substance in presents and feastings, and joustings, but all to no avail.

When it happened that having spent nearly all he possessed and ashamed to show his poverty and his unlucky love before the eyes

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of his townsmen, he betook him to the forest of Classis, it being autumn, on the pretext of snaring birds, but intending to take privily the road to Rimini and thence to Rome, and there seek his fortune. And Nastasio took with him fowling-nets, and bird-lime, and tame owls, and two horses (one of which was ridden by his servant), and food for some days ; and they alighted in the midst of the forest, and slept in one of the fowling-huts of cut branches set up by the citizens of Ravenna for their pleasure.

And it happened that on the afternoon of the second day (and it chanced to be a Friday) of his stay in the forest, Messer Nastasio, being exceeding sad in his heart, went forth towards the sea to muse upon the unkindness of his beloved and the hardness of his fortune. Now you should know that near the sea, where you can clearly hear its roaring even on windless days there is in that forest a clear place, made as by the hand of man, set round with tall pines even like a garden, but in the shape of a horse-course, free from bushes and pools, and covered with the finest greensward. Here, as Nastasio sate him on the trunk of a pine—

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the hour was sunset, the weather being uncommon clear—he heard a rushing sound in the distance, as of the sea; and there blew a death-cold wind; and then came sounds of crashing branches, and neighing of horses, and yelping of hounds, and halloes and horns. And Nastasio wondered greatly, for that was not the hour for hunting; and he hid behind a great pine trunk, fearing to be recognised. And the sounds came nearer, even of horns, and hounds, and the shouts of huntsmen; and the bushes rustled and crashed, and the hunt rushed into the clearing, horsemen and foot, with many hounds. And behold, what they pursued was not a wild boar, but something white that ran erect, and it seemed to Messer Nastasio, as if it greatly resembled a naked woman; and it screamed piteously.

Now when the hunt had swept past, Messer Nastasio rubbed his eyes and wondered greatly. But even as he wondered, and stood in the middle of the clearing, behold, part of the hunt swept back, and the thing which they pursued ran in a circle on the greensward, shrieking piteously. And behold, it was a young damsel, naked, her hair loose and full

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of brambles, with only a tattered cloth round her middle. And as she came near to where Messer Nastasio was standing (but no one of the hunt seemed to heed him) the hounds were upon her, barking furiously, and a hunter on a black horse, black even as night. And a cold wind blew and caused Nastasio's hair to stand on end ; and he tried to cry out, and to rush forward, but his voice died in his throat and his limbs were heavy, and covered with sweat, and refused to move.

Then the hounds fastening on the damsel threw her down, and he on the black horse turned swiftly, and transfixing her, shrieking dismally, with a boar-spear. And those of the hunt galloped up, and wound their horns ; and he of the black horse, which was a stately youth habited in a coat of black and gold, and black boots and black feathers on his hat, threw his reins to a groom, and alighted and approached the damsel where she lay, while the huntsmen were holding back the hounds and winding their horns. Then he drew a knife, such as are used by huntsmen, and driving its blade into the damsel's side, cut out her heart, and threw it, all smoking, into the

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midst of the hounds. And a cold wind rustled through the bushes, and all had disappeared, horses, and huntsmen, and hounds. And the grass was untrodden as if no man's foot or horse's hoof had passed there for months.

And Messer Nastasio shuddered, and his limbs loosened, and he knew that the hunter on the black horse was Messer Guido Degli Anastagi, and the damsel Monna Filomena, daughter of the Lord of Gambellara. Messer Guido had loved the damsel greatly, and been flouted by her, and leaving his home in despair, had been killed on the way by robbers, and Madonna Filomena had died shortly after. The tale was still fresh in men's memory, for it had happened in the city of Ravenna barely five years before. And those whom Nastasio had seen, both the hunter and the lady, and the huntsmen and horses and hounds, were the spirits of the dead.

When he had recovered his courage, Messer Nastasio sighed and said unto himself: "How like is my fate to that of Messer Guido! Yet would I never, even when a spectre, without weight or substance, made of wind and delusion, and arisen from hell, act with such



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cruelty towards her I love." And then he thought: "Would that the daughter of Messer Pavolo de Traversariis might hear of this! For surely it would cause her to relent!" But he knew that his words would be vain, and that none of the citizens of Ravenna, and least of all the damsel of the Traversari, would believe them, but rather esteem him a madman.

Now it came about that when Friday came round once more, Nastasio, by some chance, was again walking in the forest-clearing by the great pines, and he had forgotten; when the sea began to roar, and a cold wind blew; and there came through the forest the sound of horses and hounds, causing Messer Nastasio's hair to stand up and his limbs to grow weak as water. And he on the black horse again pursued the naked damsel, and struck here with his boar-spear, and cut out her heart and threw it to the hounds; the which hunter and damsel were the ghosts of Messer Guido, and of Madonna Filomena, daughter of the Lord of Gambellara, arisen out of Hell. And in this fashion did it happen for three Fridays following, the sea

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beginning to moan, the cold wind to blow and the spirits to hunt the deceased damsel at twilight in the clearing among the pine-trees.

Now when Messer Nastasio noticed this, he thanked Cupid, which is the Lord of all Lovers, and devised in his mind a cunning plan. And he mounted his horse and returned to Ravenna, and gave out to his friends that he had found a treasure in Rome ; and that he was minded to forget the damsel of the Traversari and seek another wife. But in reality he went to certain money-lenders, and gave himself into bondage, even to be sold as a slave to the Dalmatian pirates if he could not repay his loan. And he published that he desired to take to him a wife, and for that reason would feast all his friends and the chief citizens of Ravenna, and regale them with a pageant in the pine forest, where certain foreign slaves of his should show wonderful feats for their delight. And he sent forth invitations, and among them to Messer Pavolo de Traversariis and his wife and daughter. And he bid them for a Friday, which was also the eve of the Feast of the Dead.

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Meanwhile he took to the pine forest carpenters and masons, and such as paint and gild cunningly, and waggons of timber, and cut stone for foundations, and furniture of all kinds ; and the waggons were drawn by four and twenty yoke of oxen, grey oxen of the Romagnol breed. And he caused the artisans to work day and night, making great fires of dry myrtle and pine branches, which lit up the forest all around. And he caused them to make foundations, and build a pavilion of timber in the clearing which is the shape of a horse-course, surrounded by pines. The pavilion was oblong, raised by ten steps above the grass, open all round and reposing on arches and pillars ; and there was a projecting *abacus* under the arches over the capitals, after the Roman fashion ; and the pillars were painted red, and the capitals red also picked out with gold and blue, and a shield with the arms of the Honestis on each. The roof was raftered, each rafter painted with white lilies on a red ground, and heads of youths and damsels ; and the roof outside was made of wooden tiles, shaped like shells and gilded. And on the top of the roof was a weather-vane ; and the

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## Ravenna and her Ghosts

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vane was a figure of Cupid, god of love, cunningly carved of wood and painted like life, as he flies, poised in air, and shoots his darts on mortals. He was winged and blindfolded, to show that love is inconstant and no respecter of persons; and when the wind blew, he turned about, and the end of his scarf, which was beaten metal, swung in the wind. Now when the pavilion was ready, within six days of its beginning, carpets were spread on the floor, and seats placed, and garlands of bay and myrtle slung from pillar to pillar between the arches. And tables were set, and sideboards covered with gold and silver dishes and trenchers; and a raised place, covered with arras, was made for the players of fifes and drums and lutes; and tents were set behind for the servants, and fires prepared for cooking meat. Whole oxen and sheep were brought from Ravenna in wains, and casks of wine, and fruit and white bread, and many cooks, and serving-men, and musicians, all habited gallantly in the colours of the Honestis, which are vermilion and white, parti-coloured, with black stripes; and they wore doublets laced with gold, and on their breast the arms of the



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house of Honestis, which are a dove holding a leaf.

Now on Friday the eve of the Feast of the Dead, all was ready, and the chief citizens of Ravenna set out for the forest of Classis, with their wives and children and servants, some on horseback, and others in wains drawn by oxen, for the tracks in that forest are deep. And when they arrived, Messer Nastasio welcomed them and thanked them all, and conducted them to their places in the pavilion. Then all wondered greatly at its beauty and magnificence, and chiefly Messer Pavolo de Traversariis; and he sighed, and thought within himself, "Would that my daughter were less shrewish, that I might have so noble a son-in-law to prop up my old age!" They were seated at the tables, each according to their dignity, and they ate and drank and praised the excellence of the cheer; and flowers were scattered on the tables, and young maidens sang songs in praise of love, most sweetly. Now when they had eaten their fill, and the tables been removed, and the sun was setting between the pine-trees, Messer Nastasio caused them all to be seated facing the clearing,



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## Ravenna and her Ghosts

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and a herald came forward, in the livery of the Honestis, sounding his trumpet and declaring in a loud voice that they should now witness a pageant, the which was called the Mystery of Love and Death. Then the musicians struck up, and began a concert of fifes and lutes, exceeding sweet and mournful. And at that moment the sea began to moan, and a cold wind to blow: a sound of horsemen and hounds and horns and crashing branches came through the wood; and the damsel, the daughter of the Lord of Gambellara, rushed naked, her hair streaming and her veil torn, across the grass, pursued by the hounds, and by the ghost of Messer Guido on the black horse, the nostrils of which were filled with fire. Now when the ghost of Messer Guido struck that damsel with the boar-spear, and cut out her heart, and threw it, while the others wound their horns, to the hounds, and all vanished, Messer Nastasio de Honestis, seizing the herald's trumpet, blew in it, and cried in a loud voice, "The Pageant of Death and Love! The Pageant of Death and Love! Such is the fate of cruel damsels!" and the gilt Cupid on the roof swung round creaking

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dreadfully, and the daughter of Messer Pavolo uttered a great shriek and fell on the ground in a swoon.

Here the Romagnol manuscript comes to a sudden end, the outer sheet being torn through the middle. But we know from the De-  
cameron that the damsel of the Traversari was so impressed by the spectre-hunt she had witnessed that she forthwith relented towards Nastagio degli Onesti, and married him, and that they lived happily ever after. But whether or not that part of the pine forest of Classis still witnesses this ghostly hunt, we have no means of knowing.

On the whole, I incline to think that, when the great frost blasted the pines (if not earlier) the ghosts shifted quarters from the forest of Classis to the church of the same name, on that forest's brink. Certainly there seems nothing to prevent them. Standing in the midst of those uninhabited rice-fields and marshes, the church of Classis is yet always open, from morning till night ; the great portals gaping, no curtain interposed. Open and empty ; mass not even on Sundays ; empty of human

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## Ravenna and her Ghosts

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beings, open to the things of without. The sunbeams enter through the open side windows, cutting a slice away from that pale, greenish twilight ; making a wedge of light on the dark, damp bricks ; bringing into brief prominence some of the great sarcophagi, their peacocks and palm-trees picked out in vivid green lichen. Snakes also enter, the Sacristan tells me, and I believe it, for within the same minute, I saw a dead and a living one among the arum leaves at the gate. Is that little altar, a pagan-looking marble table, isolated in the midst of the church, the place where they meet, pagan creatures claiming those Grecian marbles ? Or do they hunt one another round the aisles and into the crypt, slithering and hissing, the souls of Guido degli Anastagi, perhaps, and of his cruel lady love ?

Such are Ravenna and Classis, and the Ghosts that haunt them.

THE COOK-SHOP AND THE  
FOWLING-PLACE





## THE COOK-SHOP AND THE FOWLING-PLACE

IN the street of the Almond and appropriately close to the covered-over canal (Rio Terra) of the Assassins, there is a cook-shop which has attracted my attention these two last months in Venice. For in its window is a row of tiny corpses—birds, raw, red, with agonised plucked little throats, the throats through which the sweet notes came. And the sight brings home to me more than the suggestion of a dish at supper, savoury things of the size of a large plum, on a cushion of polenta. . . .

I had often noticed the fowling-places which stand out against the sky like mural crowns on the low hills of Northern Italy; Bresciana is the name given to the thing, from the province, doubtless, of its origin. Last summer, driving at the foot of the Alps of Friuli, such a place was pointed out to me on a

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## The Cook-Shop and

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green knoll ; it marked the site of a village of Collalto, once the fief of the great family of that name, which had died, disappeared, church and all, after the Black Death of the fourteenth century.

The strangeness of the matter attracted me ; and I set out, the next morning, to find the fowling-place. I thought I must have lost my way, and was delighting in the radiance of a perfectly fresh, clear, already autumnal morning, walking along through the flowery grass fields in sight of the great mountains, when, suddenly, there I was before the uncanny thing, the Bresciana. Uncanny in its odd shape of walled and moated city of clipped bushes, tight-closed on its hill-top, with its Guelph battlements of hornbeam against the pale blue sky. And uncannier for its mysterious delightfulness. Imagine it set in the loveliest mossy grass, full of delicate half-Alpine flowers ; beautiful butterflies everywhere about ; and the sort of ditch surrounding it overgrown with blackberries, haws, sloes, ivy, all manner of berries ; a sort of false garden of paradise for the poor birds.

But when I craned over the locked wicket

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## the Fowling-Place

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and climbed on to the ladder alongside, what I saw was more uncanny yet. I looked down on to rows of clipped, regular, hornbeam hedges, with grass paths between them, maze-like. A kind of Versailles for the birds, you might think. Only, in the circular grass plot from which those green hedges and paths all radiated, something alarming : an empty cage hung to a tree. And going the round of the place I discovered that between the cut hornbeam battlements of the circular enclosure there was a wreath of thin wire nooses, almost invisible, in which the poor little birds hang themselves. It seems oddly appropriate that this sinister little place, with its vague resemblance to that clipped garden in which Mantegna's allegorical Vices are nesting, should be, in fact, a cemetery ; that tiny City of Dis of the Birds, on its green hillock in front of the great blue Alps, being planted on those villagers dead of the Plague.

The fowling-place began to haunt me, and I was filled with a perhaps morbid desire to know more of its evil rites. After some inquiry, I introduced myself accordingly to the most famous fowler of the neighbourhood,

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## The Cook-Shop and

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the owner of a wineshop at Martignacco. He received me with civility, and expounded his trade with much satisfaction ; an amiable, intelligent old man, with sufficient of Italian in that province of strange dialect.

In the passage at the foot of his staircase and under sundry dark arches he showed me a quantity of tiny wooden cages and of larger cages divided into tiny compartments. There were numbers of goldfinches, a blackbird, some small thrushes, an ortolan, and two or three other kinds I could not identify ; nay, even a brace of unhappy quail in a bottle-shaped basket. These are the decoys ; the cages are hung in the circular walks of the fowling-place, and the wretched little prisoners, many of them blinded of one or both eyes, sing their hearts out and attract their companions into the nooses. Then he showed me the nets—like thin, thin fishing nets—for quail ; and the little wands which are covered with lime and which catch the wings of the creatures ; but that seemed a merciful proceeding compared with the gruesome snares of the Bresciana. When he had shown me these things he produced a little

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## the Fowling-Place

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Jew's-harp, on which he fell to imitating the calls of various birds. But I noticed that none of the little blinded prisoners hanging aloft made any response. Only, quite spontaneously and all of a sudden, the poor goldfinches set up a loud and lovely song; and the solitary blackbird gave a whistle. Never have I heard anything more lugubrious than these hedgerow and woodland notes issuing from the cages in that damp, black corridor. And the old fowler, for all his venerable appearance and gentleness of voice and manner, struck me as a wicked warlock, and own sib of the witch who turned Jorinda and Joringel into nightingales in her little house hung round with cages.

A few days after my visit to the fowler, and one of the last evenings I had in Friuli, I was walking once more beneath the Castle. After threading the narrow green lanes, blocked by great hay-carts, I came of a sudden on an open, high-lying field of mossy grass, freshly scythed, with the haycocks still upon it, and a thin plantation of larches on one side. And in front, at the end of that grey-green sweetness, the Alps of Cadore, portals and



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## The Cook-Shop and

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battlements of dark leaden blue, with the last flame-colour of sunset behind them, and the sunset's last rosy feathers rising into the pale sky. The mowers were coming slowly along, shouldering their scythes and talking in undertones, as folk do at that hour. I also walked home in the quickly gathering twilight ; the delicate hemlock flowers of an unmowed field against the pearly luminous sky ; the wonderful blue of the thistles singing out in the dusk of the grass. There rose the scent of cut grass, of ripening maize, and every freshness of acacia and poplar leaf ; and the crickets began to shrill.

As the light faded away I passed within sight of the fowling-place, the little sinister formal garden of Versailles on the mound marking the village which had died of the Black Death.

This is what returned to my mind every time, lately in Venice, that I passed that cook-shop near the closed-up Canal of the Assassins, and saw the row of tiny corpses ready for roasting. The little throats which sang so sweetly had got caught, had writhed, twisted in the tiny wire nooses between the

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## the Fowling-Place

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hornbeam battlements. What ruffling of feathers and starting of eyeballs in agony there had been, while the poor blind decoy, finch or blackbird, sang, sang on in his cage on the central grass-plot!

And we scrunch them under our knife and tooth, and remark how excellent are little birds on a cushion of polenta, between a sage-leaf and a bit of bacon! But fowling-places have come down from the remotest and most venerable antiquity; and they exist of all kinds; and some of them, moreover, are allegories.



# ACQUAINTANCE WITH BIRDS





## ACQUAINTANCE WITH BIRDS

### I

ONE of the things I should have liked, I said to myself to-day, as I rode past one of the dreadful little fowling-places on the ridge of our hills, would have been to become acquainted with birds. . . .

The wish is simple, but quite without hope for a dweller in Tuscany, where, what with poverty and lawlessness, peasants' nets and city 'prentices' guns, there are no birds whose acquaintance you can make. You hear them singing and twittering, indeed, wherever a clump of garden ilexes or a cypress hedge offers them protection; but they never let themselves be seen, for they know that being seen is being shot: or at least being caged. They cage them for singing, nightingales, thrushes, and every kind of finch; and you can see them, poor isolated captives, in rows and

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## Acquaintance with Birds

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rows of cages in the markets. That is the way that people like them : a certain devout lady of my neighbourhood, for instance, whose little seventeenth-century house was hung round with endless tiny cages, like the witches in the tale of Jorinde and Jorinel ; a wicked witch herself, no doubt, despite her illuminations in honour of the Madonna, who should have taught her better. Another way of liking singing-birds is on toast between a scrap of bacon and a leaf of sage, a dainty dish much prized by persons of weak stomach. Persons with bad digestions are apt, I fancy, to lose, and make others forego, much pleasant companionship of soul.

For animals, at least, when not turned into pets, are excellent companions for our souls. I say expressly "when not pets," because the essence of this spiritual (for it *is* spiritual) relation between us and creatures is that they should not become our property, nor we theirs ; that we should be able to refresh ourselves by the thought and contemplation of a life apart from our own, different from it ; in some ways more really natural, and, at all events, capable of seeming more natural to

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## Acquaintance with Birds

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our fancy. And birds, for many reasons, meet this requirement to perfection. I have read, indeed, in various works that they are not without vices, not a bit kinder than the other unkind members of creation ; and that their treatment of the unfit among themselves is positively inhuman—or shall I say human ? Perhaps this is calumny, or superficial judgment of their sterner morality ; but, be this as it may, it is evident that they are in many respects very charming people. It is very nice of them to be so æsthetic, to be amused and kept quiet, like the hen birds, by music ; and the tone of their conversation is quite exquisitely affable.

My own opportunities of watching their proceedings have, alas ! been very limited ; but, judging by the pigeons at Venice, they are wonderfully forbearing and courteous to each other. I have often watched these pigeons having their morning bath at the corner of St. Mark's, in a little shallow trough in the pavement. They collect round by scores, and wait for room to go in quite patiently ; while the crowd inside ruffle, dip, throw up water into their wings and shake it

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## Acquaintance with Birds

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off ; a mass of moving grey and purple feathers, with never an angry push or a cry of ill-temper among them. So I can readily believe a certain friend of mine who passes hours in English brakes and hedgerows, watching birds through special ten-guinea opera-glasses, that time and money could not be better spent.

One reason, moreover, why all animals (one feels that so much in Kipling's stories) are excellent company for our spirit is surely because they are animals, not men ; because the thought of them relieves us therefore from that sense of overcrowding and jostling and general wordiness and fuss from which we all suffer ; and birds, more than any other creatures, give us that sense of relief, of breathing-space and margin, so very necessary to our spiritual welfare. For there is freedom, air, light, in the very element in which birds exist, and in their movements, the delightful sense of poising, of buoyancy, of being delivered from our own body and made independent of gravitation, which, as a friend of mine wisely remarks, Sir Isaac Newton most injudiciously put into Nature's head. Indeed, there is a very special quality in the mere thought of

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## Acquaintance with Birds

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birds. St. Francis, had he preached to fishes, like his follower of Padua, might have had as attentive an audience, but we should not have cared to hear about it. *Aves mei fratres*—why, it is the soul's kinship with air, light, liberty, what the soul loves best. And similarly I suspect that the serene and lovely quality of Dante's Francesca episode is due in great part to those similes of birds: the starlings in the winter weather, the cranes "singing their dirge," and those immortal doves swirling nestwards, *dal disio chiamate*, which lift the lid of that cavern of hell and winnow its fumes into breathable quality.

Perhaps (I say to myself, being ever disposed to make the best of a bad bargain), perhaps the scantiness of my acquaintance with birds, the difficulty about seeing them (for there is none about hearing them in Tuscany, and I shall be kept awake by vociferous nightingales in a month's time), gives to my feeling about them a pleasant, half-painful eagerness. Certainly it raises the sight of birds, when I get out of this country, into something of the nature of a performance. Even in Rome, the larks, going up tiny brown rockets, into



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## Acquaintance with Birds

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the pale blue sky above the pale green endless undulations of grass, and the rooks and magpies flocking round the ruins. And how much in Germany? Indeed, one of Germany's charms is the condition, or, rather, the position, the civic status, of birds and small creatures. One is constantly reminded of the Minnesinger Walther's legacy to the birds of Wurzburg, and of Luther's hiding the hare in the sleeve of his tunic. One of my first impressions after crossing the Alps last year was of just such a hare, only perfectly at his ease, running in front of my bicycle for ever so long during a great thunderstorm which overtook us in the cornfields between Donaustauff and Ratisbon. And as to birds! They are not merely left in liberty, but assiduously courted by these kindly, and, in their prosaic way, poetical Teutons. Already in the village shop on the top of the Tyrolese pass there was a nest of swallows deep down in a passage. And in the Lorenz Kirche at Nuremberg, while the electric trams go clanking outside, the swallows whirr cheerfully along the aisles, among the coats-of-arms, the wonderfully crested helmets suspended on high. There was a swallow's

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## Acquaintance with Birds

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nest in the big entrance room (where the peasants sit and drink among the little dry birch-trees and fir garlands from the Whitsuntide festivities) of the inn at Rothenburg; a nest above the rows of pewter and stoneware, with baby swallows looking unconcernedly out at the guests. But the great joy at Rothenburg was the family of storks which still inhabit one of the high, pointed gatehouses. I used to go and see them every morning: the great cartwheel on the funnel-shaped roof, wisps of comfortable hay hanging over it; one of the parent storks standing sentinel on one leg, the little ones raising themselves occasionally into sight, the other stork hovering around on outspread wings like tattered banners. To think that there were once storks also in Italy, storks' homes, the old Lombard name *Gicognara* meaning that; and cranes also, whom the people in Boccaccio, and even Lorenzo di Medici, went out to hunt! The last of them were certainly netted and eaten, as they used to eat porcupines in Rome in my childish days.

Speaking of cranes reminds me of the pleasure I have had also in watching herons, particularly among the ponds of my mother's old home.

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## Acquaintance with Birds

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“Would you like to see one near? I’ll go and shoot it you at once,” said my very kind cousin.

How odd it is, when one thinks of it, that mere contemplation seems so insufficient for us poor restless human beings! We cannot see a flower without an impulse to pick it, a character without an impulse to, let us say, analyse; a bird without an impulse to shoot. And in this way we certainly lose most of the good which any of these things could be to us: just to be looked at, thought about, enjoyed, and let alone.

ARIADNE IN MANTUA

TO  
ETHEL SMYTH  
THANKING, AND BEGGING,  
HER FOR MUSIC.





## PREFACE

Alles Vergangliche ist nur ein Gleichnis.

It is in order to give others the pleasure of reading or re-reading a small masterpiece, that I mention the likelihood of the catastrophe of my *Ariadne* having been suggested by the late Mr. Shorthouse's *Little Schoolmaster Mark*; but I must ask forgiveness of my dear old friend, Madame Emile Duclaux (Mary Robinson), for unwarranted use of one of the songs of her *Italian Garden*.

Readers of my own little volume *Genius Loci* may meanwhile recognise that I have been guilty of plagiarism towards myself also. For a couple of years after writing those pages, the image of the Palace of Mantua and the lakes it steeps in, haunted my fancy with that peculiar insistency, as of the half-lapsed recollection of a name or date, which tells us that we know (if we could only remember!) *what happened in a place*. I let the matter

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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rest. But, looking into my mind one day, I found that a certain song of the early seventeenth century—(not Monteverde's *Lamento d'Arianna*, but an air, *Amarilli*, by Caccini, printed alongside in Parisotti's collection)—had entered that palace of Mantua, and was, in some manner not easy to define, the musical shape of what must have happened there. And that, translated back into human personages, was the story I have set forth in the following little Drama.

So much for the origin of *Ariadne in Mantua*, supposing any friend to be curious about it. What seems more interesting is my feeling, which grew upon me as I worked over and over the piece and its French translation, that these personages had an importance greater than that of their life and adventures, a meaning, if I may say so, a little *sub specie æternitatis*. For, besides the real figures, there appeared to me vague shadows cast by them, as it were, on the vast spaces of life, and magnified far beyond those little puppets that I twitched. And I seem to feel here the struggle, eternal, necessary, between mere impulse, unreasoning and violent, but absolutely true to its aim,

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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and all the moderating, the weighing and restraining influences of civilisation, with their idealism, their vacillation, but their final triumph over the mere forces of nature. These well-born people of Mantua, privileged beings wanting little because they have much, and able therefore to spend themselves in quite harmonious effort, must necessarily get the better of the poor gutter-born creature without whom, after all, one of them would have been dead and the others would have had no opening in life. Poor *Diego* acts magnanimously, being cornered; but he (or she) has not the delicacy, the dignity to melt into thin air with a mere lyric Metastasian "*Piangendo parti*" and leave them to their untroubled conscience. He must needs assert himself, violently wrench at their heart-strings, give them a final stab, hand them over to endless remorse; briefly, commit that public and theatrical deed of suicide, splashing the murderous waters into the eyes of well-behaved wedding guests.

Certainly neither the *Duke*, nor the *Duchess Dowager*, nor *Hippolyta* would have done this. But, on the other hand, they could calmly,

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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coldly, kindly accept the self-sacrifice culminating in that suicide: well-bred people, faithful to their standards and forcing others, however unwilling, into their own conformity. Of course, without them the world would be a den of thieves, a wilderness of wolves; for they are—if I may call them by their less personal names—Tradition, Discipline, Civilisation.

On the other hand, but for such as *Diego* the world would come to an end within twenty years; mere sense of duty and fitness not being sufficient for the killing and cooking of victuals, let alone the begetting and suckling of children. The descendants of *Ferdinand* and *Hippolyta*, unless they intermarried with some bastard of *Diego's* family, would dwindle, die out; who knows, perhaps supplement the impulses they lacked by silly new-fangled evil.

These are the contending forces of history and life: Impulse and Discipline, creating and keeping; love such as *Diego's*, blind, selfish, magnanimous; and detachment, noble, a little bloodless and cruel, like that of the *Duke of Mantua*.

And it seems to me that the conflicts which I

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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set forth on my improbable little stage, are but the trifling realities shadowing those great abstractions which we seek all through the history of man, and everywhere in man's own heart.

VERNON LEE.





VIOLA. . . . . I'll serve this Duke :  
. . . . . for I can sing  
And speak to him in many sorts of music.

TWELFTH NIGHT, I. 2.

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

FERDINAND, Duke of Mantua.  
THE CARDINAL, his Uncle.  
THE DUCHESS DOWAGER.  
HIPPOLYTA, Princess of Mirandola.  
MAGDALEN, known as DIEGO.  
THE MARCHIONESS OF GUASTALLA.  
THE BISHOP OF CREMONA.  
THE DOGE'S WIFE.  
THE VENETIAN AMBASSADOR.  
THE DUKE OF FERRARA'S POET.  
THE VICEROY OF NAPLES' JESTER.  
A TENOR AS BACCHUS.  
THE CARDINAL'S CHAPLAIN.  
THE DUCHESS'S GENTLEWOMAN.  
THE PRINCESS'S TUTOR.

Singers as Mænads and Satyrs ; Courtiers, Pages, Wedding  
Guests and Musicians.

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*The action takes place in the Palace of Mantua through a period of a year, during the reign of Prospero I. of Milan, and shortly before the Venetian expedition to Cyprus under Othello*

## ARIADNE IN MANTUA

### ACT I

*The CARDINAL's Study in the Palace at Mantua.*

*The CARDINAL is seated at a table covered with Persian embroidery, rose-colour picked out with blue, on which lies open a volume of Machiavelli's works, and in it a manuscript of Catullus ; alongside thereof are a bell and a magnifying-glass. Under his feet a red cushion with long tassels, and an Oriental carpet of pale lavender and crimson. The CARDINAL is dressed in scarlet, a crimson fur-lined cape upon his shoulders. He is old, but beautiful and majestic, his face furrowed like the marble bust of Seneca among the books opposite.*

*Through the open Renaissance window, with candelabra and birds carved on the copings, one sees the lake, pale blue, faintly rippled, with a rose-coloured brick bridge and bridge-*

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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*tower at its narrowest point. DIEGO (in reality MAGDALEN) has just been admitted into the CARDINAL's presence, and after kissing his ring, has remained standing, awaiting his pleasure.*

*DIEGO is fantastically habited as a youth in russet and violet tunic reaching below the knees in Moorish fashion, as we see it in the frescoes of Pinturicchio; with silver buttons down the seams, and plaited linen at the throat and in the unbuttoned purples of the sleeves. His hair, dark but red where it catches the light, is cut over the forehead and touches his shoulders. He is not very tall in his boy's clothes, and very sparsely built. He is pale, almost sallow; the face, dogged, sullen, rather expressive than beautiful, save for the perfection of the brows and of the flower-like singer's mouth. He stands ceremoniously before the CARDINAL, one hand on his dagger, nervously, while the other holds a large travelling-hat, looped up, with a long drooping plume.*

*The CARDINAL raises his eyes, slightly bows his head, closes the manuscript and the volume, and puts both aside deliberately. He is,*



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## Ariadne in Mantua

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*meanwhile, examining the appearance of*  
DIEGO.

CARDINAL. We are glad to see you at Mantua, Signor Diego. And from what our worthy Venetian friend informs us in the letter which he gave you for our hands, we shall without a doubt be wholly satisfied with your singing, which is said to be both sweet and learned. Prythee, Brother Matthias (*turning to his Chaplain*), bid them bring hither my virginal—that with the Judgment of Paris painted on the lid by Giulio Romano ; its tone is admirably suited to the human voice. And, Brother Matthias, hasten to the Duke's own theorbo player, and bid him come straightways. Nay, go thyself, good Brother Matthias, and seek till thou hast found him. We are impatient to judge of this good youth's skill.

*The Chaplain bows and retires. DIEGO (in reality MAGDALEN) remains alone in the CARDINAL's presence. The CARDINAL remains for a second turning over a letter, and then reads through the magnifying-glass out loud.*

CARDINAL. Ah, here is the sentence :  
“ Diego, a Spaniard of Moorish descent, and a

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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most expert singer and player on the virginal, whom I commend to your Eminence's favour as entirely fitted for such services as your revered letter makes mention of——" Good, good.

*The CARDINAL folds the letter and beckons DIEGO to approach, then speaks in a manner suddenly altered to abruptness, but with no inquiry in his tone.*

Signor Diego, you are a woman——

*DIEGO starts, flushes and exclaims huskily, "My Lord——" But the CARDINAL makes a deprecatory movement and continues his sentence.*

and, as my honoured Venetian correspondent assures me, a courtesan of some experience and of more than usual tact. I trust this favourable judgment may be justified. The situation is delicate; and the work for which you have been selected is dangerous as well as difficult. Have you been given any knowledge of this case?

*DIEGO has by this time recovered his composure, and answers with respectful reserve.*

DIEGO. I asked no questions, your Eminence.

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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But the Senator Gratiano vouchsafed to tell me that my work at Mantua would be to soothe and cheer with music your noble nephew Duke Ferdinand, who, as is rumoured, has been a prey to a certain languor and moodiness ever since his return from many years' captivity among the Infidels. Moreover (such were the Senator Gratiano's words), that if the Fates proved favourable to my music, I might gain access to his Highness's confidence, and thus enable your Eminence to understand and compass his strange malady.

CARDINAL. Even so. You speak discreetly, Diego; and your manner gives hope of more good sense than is usual in your sex and in your trade. But this matter is of more difficulty than such as you can realise. Your being a woman will be of use should our scheme prove practicable. In the outset it may wreck us beyond recovery. For all his gloomy apathy, my nephew is quick to suspicion, and extremely subtle. He will delight in flouting us, should the thought cross his brain that we are practising some coarse and foolish stratagem. And it so happens, that his strange moodiness is marked by abhorrence of all

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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womankind. For months he has refused the visits of his virtuous mother. And the mere name of his young cousin and affianced bride, Princess Hippolyta, has thrown him into paroxysms of anger. Yet Duke Ferdinand possesses all his faculties. He is aware of being the last of our house, and must know full well that, should he die without an heir, this noble dukedom will become the battlefield of rapacious alien claimants. He denies none of this, but nevertheless looks on marriage with unseemly horror.

DIEGO. Is it so?—And—is there any reason his Highness's melancholy should take this shape? I crave your Eminence's pardon if there is any indiscretion in this question; but I feel it may be well that I should know some more upon this point. Has Duke Ferdinand suffered some wrong at the hands of women? Or is it the case of some passion, hopeless, unfitting to his rank, perhaps?

CARDINAL. Your imagination, good Madam Magdalen, runs too easily along the tracks familiar to your sex; and such inquisitiveness smacks too much of the courtesan. And beware, my lad, of touching on such subjects

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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with the Duke : women and love, and so forth. For I fear, that while endeavouring to elicit the Duke's secret, thy eyes, thy altered voice, might betray thy own.

DIEGO. Betray me ? My secret ? What do you mean, my Lord ? I fail to grasp your meaning.

CARDINAL. Have you so soon forgotten that the Duke must not suspect your being a woman ? For if a woman may gradually melt his torpor, and bring him under the control of reason and duty, this can only come about by her growing familiar and necessary to him without alarming his moody virtue.

DIEGO. I crave your Eminence's indulgence for that one question, which I repeat because, as a musician, it may affect my treatment of his Highness. Has the Duke ever loved ?

CARDINAL. Too little or too much—which of the two it will be for you to find out. My nephew was ever, since his boyhood, a pious and joyless youth ; and such are apt to love once, and, as the poets say, to die for love. Be this as it may, keep to your part of singer ; and even if you suspect that he suspects you, let him not see your suspicion, and still less



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## Ariadne in Mantua

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justify his own. Be merely a singer : a sexless creature, having seen passion but never felt it ; yet capable, by the miracle of art, of rousing and soothing it in others. Go warily, and mark my words : there is, I notice, even in your speaking voice, a certain quality such as folk say melts hearts ; a trifle of hoarseness, a something of a break, which mars it as mere sound, but gives it more power than that of sound. Employ that quality when the fit moment comes, but most times restrain it. You have understood ?

DIEGO. I think I have, my Lord.

CARDINAL. Then only one word more. Women, and women such as you, are often ill advised and foolishly ambitious. Let not success, should you have any in this enterprise, endanger it and you. Your safety lies in being my tool. My spies are everywhere ; but I require none ; I seem to know the folly which poor mortals think and feel. And see ! this palace is surrounded on three sides by lakes ; a rare and beautiful circumstance, which has done good service on occasion. Even close to this pavilion these blue waters are less shallow than they seem.

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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DIEGO. I had noted it. Such an enterprise as mine requires courage, my Lord ; and your palace, built into the lake, as life—saving all thought of heresy—is built out into death, your palace may give courage as well as prudence.

CARDINAL. Your words, Diego, are irrelevant, but do not displease me.

DIEGO *bows.* *The Chaplain enters with Pages carrying a harpsichord, which they place upon the table ; also two Musicians with theorbo and viol.*

Brother Matthias, thou hast been a skilful organist, and hast often delighted me with thy fugues and canons—Sit to the instrument, and play a prelude, while this good youth collects his memory and his voice preparatory to displaying his skill.

*The Chaplain, not unlike the Monk in Titian's "Concert," begins to play, DIEGO standing by him at the harpsichord. While the cunningly interlaced themes, with wide, unclosed cadences, tinkle metallically from the instrument, the CARDINAL watches, very deliberately, the face of DIEGO, seeking to penetrate through its sullen sedateness. But DIEGO*

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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*remains with his eyes fixed on the view framed by the window: the pale blue lake, of the colour of periwinkle, under a sky barely bluer than itself, and the lines on the horizon—piled-up clouds or perhaps Alps. Only, as the Chaplain is about to finish his prelude, the face of DIEGO undergoes a change: a sudden fervour and tenderness transfigure the features; while the eyes, from very dark turn to the colour of carnelian. This illumination dies out as quickly as it came, and DIEGO becomes very self-contained and very listless as before.*

DIEGO. Will it please your Eminence that I should sing the Lament of Ariadne on Naxos?

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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### ACT II

*A few months later. Another part of the Ducal Palace of Mantua. The DUCHESS's closet: a small irregular chamber; the vaulted ceiling painted with Giottesque patterns in blue and russet, much blackened, and among which there is visible only a coronation of the Virgin, white and vision-like. Shelves with a few books and phials and jars of medicine; a small movable organ in a corner; and, in front of the ogival window, a praying-chair and large crucifix. The crucifix is black against the landscape, against the grey and misty waters of the lake; and framed by the nearly leafless branches of a willow growing below.*

*The DUCHESS DOWAGER is tall and straight, but almost bodiless in her black nun-like dress. Her face is so white, its lips and eyebrows so colourless, and eyes so pale a blue, that one might at first think it*

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## Ariadne in Mantua

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*insignificant, and only gradually notice the strength and beauty of the features. The DUCHESS has laid aside her sewing on the entrance of DIEGO, in reality MAGDALEN ; and, forgetful of all state, been on the point of rising to meet him. But DIEGO has ceremoniously let himself down on one knee, expecting to kiss her hand.*

DUCHESS. Nay, Signor Diego, do not kneel. Such forms have long since left my life, nor are they, as it seems to me, very fitting between God's creatures. Let me grasp your hand, and look into the face of him whom Heaven has chosen to work a miracle. You have cured my son !

DIEGO. It is indeed a miracle of Heaven, most gracious madam ; and one in which, alas, my poor self has been as nothing. For sounds, subtly linked, take wondrous powers from the soul of him who frames their patterns ; and we, who sing, are merely as the string or keys he presses, or as the reed through which he blows. The virtue is not ours, though coming out of us.

*DIEGO has made this speech as if learned by rote, with listless courtesy. The*



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DUCHESS *has at first been frozen by his manner, but at the end she answers very simply.*

DUCHESS. You speak too learnedly, good Signor Diego, and your words pass my poor understanding. The virtue in any of us is but God's finger-touch or breath ; but those He chooses as His instruments are, methinks, angels or saints ; and whatsoever you be, I look upon you with loving awe. You smile ? You are a courtier, while I, although I have not left this palace for twenty years, have long forgotten the words and ways of courts. I am but a simpleton ; a foolish old woman who has unlearned all ceremony through many years of many sorts of sorrow ; and now, dear youth, unlearned it more than ever from sheer joy at what it has pleased God to do through you. For, thanks to you, I have seen my son again, my dear, wise, tender son again. I would fain thank you. If I had worldly goods which you have not in plenty, or honours to give, they should be yours. You shall have my prayers. For even you, so favoured of Heaven, will some day want them.

DIEGO. Give them me now, most gracious

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madam. I have no faith in prayers ; but I need them.

DUCHESS. Great joy has made me heartless as well as foolish. I have hurt you, somehow. Forgive me, Signor Diego.

DIEGO. As you said, I am a courtier, madam, and I know it is enough if we can serve our princes. We have no business with troubles of our own ; but having them, we keep them to ourselves. His Highness awaits me at this hour for the usual song which happily unclouds his spirit. Has your Grace any message for him ?

DUCHESS. Stay. My son will wait a little while. I require you, Diego, for I have hurt you. Your words are terrible, but just. We princes are brought up—but many of us, alas, are princes in this matter !—to think that when we say “I thank you” we have done our duty ; though our very satisfaction, our joy, may merely bring out by comparison the emptiness of heart, the secret soreness, of those we thank. We are not allowed to see the burdens of others, and merely load them with our own.

DIEGO. Is this not wisdom ? Princes should not see those burdens which they

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cannot, which they must not, try to carry. And after all, princes or slaves, can others ever help us, save with their purse, with advice, with a concrete favour, or, say, with a song? Our troubles smart because they are *our* troubles; our burdens weigh because on *our* shoulders; they are part of us, and cannot be shifted. But God doubtless loves such kind thoughts as you have, even if, with your Grace's indulgence, they are useless.

DUCHESS. If it were so, God would be no better than an earthly prince. But believe me, Diego, if He prefer what you call kindness—bare sense of brotherhood in suffering—'tis for its usefulness. We cannot carry each other's burden for a minute; true, and rightly so; but we can give each other added strength to bear it.

DIEGO. By what means, please your Grace?

DUCHESS. By love, Diego.

DIEGO. Love! But that was surely never a source of strength, craving your Grace's pardon?

DUCHESS. The love which I am speaking of—and it may surely bear the name, since 'tis the only sort of love that cannot turn to hatred.

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Love for who requires it because it is required—say love of any woman who has been a mother for any child left motherless. Nay, forgive my boldness : my gratitude gives me rights on you, Diego. You are unhappy ; you are still a child ; and I imagine that you have no mother.

DIEGO. I am told I had one, gracious madam. She was, saving your Grace's presence, only a light woman, and sold for a ducat to the Infidels. I cannot say I ever missed her. Forgive me, madam. Although a courtier, the stock I come from is extremely base. I have no understanding of the words of noble women and saints like you. My vileness thinks them hollow ; and my pretty manners are only, as your Grace has unluckily had occasion to see, a very thin and bad veneer. I thank your Grace, and once more crave permission to attend the Duke.

DUCHESS. Nay. That is not true. Your soul is nowise base-born. I owe you everything, and, by some inadvertence, I have done nothing save stir up pain in you. I want—the words may seem presumptuous, yet carry a meaning which is humble—I want to be your

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friend ; and to help you to a greater, better Friend. I will pray for you, Diego.

DIEGO. No, no. You are a pious and virtuous woman, and your pity and prayers must keep fit company.

DUCHESS. The only fitting company for pity and prayers, for love, dear lad, is the company of those who need them. Am I over bold ?

*The DUCHESS has risen, and shyly laid her hand on DIEGO's shoulder. DIEGO breaks loose and covers his face, exclaiming in a dry and husky voice.*

DIEGO. Oh the cruelty of loneliness, madam ! Save for two years which taught me by comparison its misery, I have lived in loneliness always in this lonely world ; though never, alas, alone. Would it had always continued ! But as the wayfarer from out of the snow and wind feels his limbs numb and frozen in the hearth's warmth, so, having learned that one might speak, be understood, be comforted, that one might love and be beloved—the misery of loneliness was revealed to me. And then to be driven back into it once more, shut into it for ever ! Oh,



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madam, when one can no longer claim understanding and comfort; no longer say "I suffer: help me!"—because the creature one would say it to is the very same who hurts and spurns one!

DUCHESS. How can a child like you already know such things? We women may, indeed. I was as young as you, years ago, when I too learned it. And since I learned it, let my knowledge, my poor child, help you to bear it. I know how silence galls and wearies. If silence hurts you, speak—not for me to answer, but understand and sorrow for you. I am old and simple and unlearned; but, God willing, I shall understand.

DIEGO. If anything could help me, 'tis the sense of kindness such as yours. I thank you for your gift; but acceptance of it would be theft; for it is not meant for what I really am. And though a living lie in many things, I am still, oddly enough, honest. Therefore, I pray you, madam, farewell.

DUCHESS. Do not believe it, Diego. Where it is needed, our poor loving kindness can never be stolen.

DIEGO. Do not tempt me, madam! O

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God, I do not want your pity, your loving kindness ! What are such things to me ? And as to understanding my sorrows, no one can, save the very one who is inflicting them. Besides, you and I call different things by the same names. What you call *love*, to me means nothing : nonsense taught to children, priest's metaphysics. What *I* mean, you do not know. (*A pause, DIEGO walks up and down in agitation.*) But woe's me ! You have awakened the power of breaking through this silence—this silence which is starvation and deathly thirst and suffocation. And it so happens that if I speak to you all will be wrecked. (*A pause.*) But there remains nothing to wreck ! Understand me, madam, I care not who you are. I know that once I have spoken, you *must* become my enemy. But I am grateful to you ; you have shown me the way to speaking ; and, no matter now to whom, I now *must* speak.

DUCHESS. You shall speak to God, my friend, though you speak seemingly to me.

DIEGO. To God ! To God ! These are the icy generalities we strike upon under all pious warmth. No, gracious madam, I will

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not speak to God ; for God knows it already, and, knowing, looks on indifferent. I will speak to *you*. Not because you are kind and pitiful ; for you will cease to be so. Not because you will understand ; for you never will. I will speak to you because, although you are a saint, you are *his* mother, have kept somewhat of his eyes and mien ; because it will hurt you if I speak, as I would it might hurt *him*. I am a woman, madam ; a harlot ; and I was the Duke your son's mistress while among the Infidels.

*A long silence. The DUCHESS remains seated. She barely starts, exclaiming " Ah !—," and becomes suddenly absorbed in thought. DIEGO stands looking listlessly through the window at the lake and the willow.*

DIEGO. I await your Grace's orders. Will it please you that I call your maid-of-honour, or summon the gentleman outside ? If it so please you, there need be no scandal. I shall give myself up to any one your Grace prefers.

*The DUCHESS pays no attention to DIEGO's last words, and remains reflecting.*

DUCHESS. Then, it is he who, as you call it,

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spurns you ? How so ? For you are admitted to his close familiarity ; nay, you have worked the miracle of curing him. I do not understand the situation. For, Diego—I know not by what other name to call you—I feel your sorrow is a deep one. You are not the—woman who would despair and call God cruel for a mere lover's quarrel. You love my son ; you have cured him—cured him, do I guess rightly ?—through your love. But if it be so, what can my son have done to break your heart ?

DIEGO (*after listening astonished at the DUCHESS's unaltered tone of kindness*). Your Grace will understand the matter as much as I can ; and I cannot. He does not recognise me, madam.

DUCHESS. Not recognise you ? What do you mean ?

DIEGO. What the words signify : Not recognise.

DUCHESS. Then—he does not know—he still believes you to be—a stranger ?

DIEGO. So it seems, madam.

DUCHESS. And yet you have cured his melancholy by your presence. And in the past—tell me ; had you ever sung to him ?

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DIEGO (*weeping silently*). Daily, madam.

DUCHESS (*slowly*). They say that Ferdinand is, thanks to you, once more in full possession of his mind. It cannot be. Something still lacks ; he is not fully cured.

DIEGO. Alas, he is. The Duke remembers everything, save me.

DUCHESS. There is some mystery in this. I do not understand such matters. But I know that Ferdinand could never be base towards you knowingly. And you, methinks, would never be base towards him. Diego, time will bring light into this darkness. Let us pray God together that He may make our eyes and souls able to bear it.

DIEGO. I cannot pray for light, most gracious madam, because I fear it. Indeed I cannot pray at all ; there remains nought to pray for. But, among the vain and worldly songs I have had to get by heart, there is, by chance, a kind of little hymn, a childish little verse, but a sincere one. And while you pray for me—for you promised to pray for me, madam—I should like to sing it, with your Grace's leave.

DIEGO *opens a little movable organ in a corner, and strikes a few chords, remain-*



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*ing standing the while. The DUCHESS kneels down before the crucifix, turning her back upon him. While she is silently praying, DIEGO, still on his feet, sings very low to a kind of lullaby tune.*

Mother of God,  
We are thy weary children ;  
Teach us, thou weeping Mother,  
To cry ourselves to sleep.

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### ACT III

*Three months later. Another part of the Palace of Mantua: the hanging gardens in the DUKE's apartments. It is the first warm night of Spring. The lemon-trees have been brought out that day, and fill the air with fragrance. Terraces and flights of steps; in the background the dark mass of the palace, with its cupolas and fortified towers; here and there a lit window picking out the dark; and from above the principal yards, the flare of torches rising into the deep blue of the sky. In the course of the scene, the moon gradually emerges from behind a group of poplars on the opposite side of the lake into which the palace is built. During the earlier part of the act, darkness. Great stillness, with only, occasionally, the splash of a fisherman's oar, or a very distant thrum of mandolines.—*  
*THE DUKE and DIEGO are walking up and down the terrace.*

DUKE. Thou askedst me once, dear Diego,

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the meaning of that labyrinth which I have had carved, a shapeless pattern enough, but well suited, methinks, to blue and gold, upon the ceiling of my new music-room. And wouldst have asked, I fancy, as many have done, the hidden meaning of the device surrounding it. —I left thee in the dark, dear lad, and treated thy curiosity in peevish manner. Thou hast long forgiven and perhaps forgotten, deeming my lack of courtesy but another ailment of thy poor sick master ; another of those odd ungracious moods with which, kindest of healing creatures, thou hast had such wise and cheerful patience. I have often wished to tell thee, but I could not. 'Tis only now, in some mysterious fashion, I seem myself once more—able to do my judgment's bidding, and to dispose, in memory and words, of my own past. My strange sickness, which thou hast cured, melting its mists away with thy beneficent music even as the sun penetrates and sucks away the fogs of dawn from our lakes—my sickness, Diego, the sufferings of my flight from Barbary : the horror, perhaps, of that shipwreck which cast me (so they say, for I remember nothing) senseless on the Illyrian

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coast—these things, or Heaven's judgment on but a lukewarm Crusader, had somehow played strange havoc with my will and recollections. I could not think; or thinking, not speak; or recollecting, feel that he whom I thought of in the past was this same man, myself.

*The DUKE pauses, and leaning on the parapet, watches the long reflections of the big stars in the water.*

But now, and thanks to thee, Diego, I am another; I am myself.

*DIEGO's face, invisible in the darkness, has undergone dreadful convulsions. His breast heaves, and he stops for breath before answering; but when he does so, controls his voice into its usual rather artificially cadenced tone.*

DIEGO. And now, dear master, you can recollect—all?

DUKE. Recollect, sweet friend, and tell thee. For it is seemly that I should break through this churlish silence with thee. Thou didst cure the weltering distress of my poor darkened mind; I would have thee, now, know somewhat of the past of thy grateful

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patient. The maze, Diego, carved and gilded on that ceiling is but a symbol of my former life ; and the device which, being interpreted, means " I seek straight ways," the expression of my wish and duty.

DIEGO. You loathed the maze, my Lord ?

DUKE. Not so. I loved it then. And I still love it now. But I have issued from it— issued to recognise that the maze was good. Though it is good I left it. When I entered it, I was a raw youth, although in years a man ; full of easy theory, and thinking all practice simple ; unconscious of passion, ready to govern the world with a few learned notions ; moreover, never having known either happiness or grief, never loved and wondered at a creature different from myself ; acquainted, not with the straight roads which I now seek, but only with the rectangular walls of schoolrooms. The maze, and all the maze implied, made me a man.

DIEGO (*who has listened with conflicting feelings, and now unable to conceal his joy*).

A man, dear master ; and the gentlest, most just of men. Then, that maze—— But idle stories, interpreting all spiritual meaning as



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prosy fact, would have it that this symbol was a reality. The legend of your captivity, my Lord, has turned the pattern on that ceiling into a real labyrinth, some cunningly built fortress or prison, where the Infidels kept you, and whose clue—you found, and with the clue, freedom, after five weary years.

DUKE. Whose clue, dear Diego, was given into my hands—the clue meaning freedom, but also eternal parting—by the most faithful, intrepid, magnanimous, the most loving—and the most beloved of women !

*The DUKE has raised his arms from the parapet, and drawn himself erect, folding them on his breast, and seeking for DIEGO's face in the darkness. But DIEGO, unseen by the DUKE, has clutched the parapet and sunk on to a bench.*

DUKE (*walking up and down, slowly and meditatively, after a pause*). The poets have fabled many things concerning virtuous women. The Roman Arria, who stabbed herself to make honourable suicide easier for her husband ; Antigone, who buried her brother at the risk of death ; and the Thracian Alkestis, who descended into the kingdom

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of Death in place of Admetus. But none, to my mind, comes up to *her*. For fancy is but thin and simple, a web of few bright threads ; whereas reality is closely knitted out of the numberless fibres of life, of pain and joy. For note it, Diego—those antique women whom we read of were daughters of kings, or of Romans more than kings ; bred of a race of heroes, and trained, while still playing with dolls, to pride themselves on austere duty, and look upon the wounds and maimings of their soul as their brothers and husbands looked upon the mutilations of battle. Whereas here ; here was a creature infinitely humble, a waif, a poor spurned toy of brutal mankind's pleasure ; accustomed only to bear contumely, or to snatch, unthinking, what scanty happiness lay along her difficult and despised path—a wild creature, who had never heard such words as duty or virtue ; and yet whose acts first taught me what they truly meant.

DIEGO (*who has recovered himself, and is now leaning in his turn on the parapet*). Ah—a light woman, bought and sold many times over, my Lord ; but who loved, at last.

DUKE. That is the shallow and contemptuous

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way in which men think, Diego—and boys like thee pretend to ; those to whom life is but a chess-board, a neatly painted surface alternate black and white, most suitable for skilful games, with a soul clean lost or gained at the end ! I thought like that. But I grew to understand life as a solid world : rock, fertile earth, veins of pure metal, mere mud, all strangely mixed and overlaid ; and eternal fire at the core ! I learned it, knowing Magdalen.

DIEGO. Her name was Magdalen ?

DUKE. So she bade me call her.

DIEGO. And the name explained the trade ?

DUKE (*after a pause*). I cannot understand thee, Diego—cannot understand thy lack of understanding—— Well yes ! Her trade. All in this universe is trade, trade of prince, pope, philosopher or harlot ; and once the badge put on, the licence signed—the badge a crown or a hot iron's brand, as the case may be—why, then we ply it according to prescription, and that's all ! Yes, Diego—since thou obligest me to say it in its harshness, I do so, and I glory for her in every contemptuous word I use !—The woman I speak of was but a poor

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Venetian courtesan ; some drab's child, sold to the Infidels as to the Christians ; and my cruel pirate master's—shall we say ?—mistress. There ! For the first time, Diego, thou dost not understand me ; or is it—that I misjudged thee, thinking thee, dear boy——(*breaks off hurriedly*).

DIEGO (*very slowly*). Thinking me what, my Lord ?

DUKE (*lightly, but with effort*). Less of a little Sir Paragon of Virtue than a dear child, who is only a child, must be.

DIEGO. It is better, perhaps, that your Highness should be certain of my limitations—But I crave your Highness's pardon. I had meant to say that being a waif myself, pure gutter-bred, I have known, though young, more Magdalens than you, my Lord. They are, in a way, my sisters ; and had I been a woman, I should, likely enough, have been one myself.

DUKE. You mean, Diego ?

DIEGO. I mean that, knowing them well, I also know that women such as your Highness has described occasionally learn to love most truly. Nay, let me finish, my Lord ; I was not

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going to repeat a mere sentimental commonplace. Briefly then, that such women, being expert in love, sometimes understand, quicker than virtuous dames brought up to heroism, when love for them is cloyed. They can walk out of a man's house or life with due alacrity, being trained to such flittings. Or, recognising the first signs of weariness before 'tis known to him who feels it, they can open the door for the other—hand him the clue of the labyrinth with a fine theatric gesture!—But I crave your Highness's pardon for enlarging on this theme.

DUKE. Thou speakest, Diego, as if thou hadst a mind to wound thy master. Is this, my friend, the reward of my confiding in thee, even if tardily?

DIEGO. I stand rebuked, my Lord. But, in my own defence—how shall I say it?—Your Highness has a manner to-night which disconcerts me by its novelty; a saying things and then unsaying them; suggesting and then, somehow, treading down the suggestion like a spark of your lightning. Lovers, I have been told, use such a manner to revive their flagging feeling by playing on the other one's.



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Even in so plain and solid a thing as friendship, such ways—I say it subject to your Highness's displeasure—are dangerous. But in love, I have known cases where, carried to certain lengths, such ways of speaking undermined a woman's faith and led her to desperate things. Women, despite their strength, which often surprises us, are brittle creatures. Did you never, perhaps, make trial of this—Magdalen, with——

DUKE. With what? Good God, Diego, 'tis I who ask thy pardon; and thou sheddest a dreadful light upon the past. But it is not possible. I am not such a cur that, after all she did, after all she was—my life saved by her audacity a hundred times, made rich and lovely by her love, her wit, her power—that I could ever have whimpered for my freedom, or made her suspect I wanted it more than I wanted her? Is it possible, Diego?

DIEGO (*slowly*). Why more than you wanted her? She may have thought the two compatible.

DUKE. Never. First, because my escape could not be compassed save by her staying behind; and then because—she knew, in fact,

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what thing I was, or must become, once set at liberty.

DIEGO (*after a pause*). I see. You mean, my Lord, that you being Duke of Mantua, while she—— If she knew that ; knew it not merely as a fact, but as one knows the full savour of grief—well, she was indeed the paragon you think ; one might indeed say, bating one point, a virtuous woman.

DUKE. Thou hast understood, dear Diego, and I thank thee for it.

DIEGO. But I fear, my Lord, she did not know these things. Such as she, as yourself remarked, are not trained to conceive of duty, even in others. Passion moves them ; and they believe in passion. You loved her ; good. Why then, at Mantua as in Barbary. No, my dear master, believe me ; she had seen your love was turning stale, and set you free, rather than taste its staleness. Passion, like duty, has its pride ; and even we waifs, as gypsies, have our point of honour.

DUKE. Stale ! My love grown stale ! You make me laugh, boy, instead of angering. Stale ! You never knew her. She was not like a song—even your sweetest song—which,

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heard too often, cloys, its phrases dropping to senseless notes. She was like music—the whole art: new modes, new melodies, new rhythms, with every day and hour, passionate, or sad, or gay, or very quiet; more wondrous notes than in thy voice; and more strangely sweet, even when they grated, than the tone of those new-fangled fiddles, which wound the ear and pour balm in, they make now at Cremona.

DIEGO. You loved her then, sincerely?

DUKE. Methinks it may be Diego now, tormenting his Master with needless questions. Loved her, boy! I love her.

*A long pause. DIEGO has covered his face, with a gesture as if about to speak. But the moon has suddenly risen from behind the poplars, and put scales of silver light upon the ripples of the lake, and a pale luminous mist around the palace. As the light invades the terrace, a sort of chill has come upon both speakers; they walk up and down farther from one another.*

DIEGO. A marvellous story, dear Master. And I thank you from my heart for having told it me. I always loved you, and I thought

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I knew you. I know you better still, now. You are——a most magnanimous prince.

DUKE. Alas, dear lad, I am but a poor prisoner of my duties ; a poorer prisoner, and a sadder far, than there in Barbary—— O Diego, how I have longed for her ! How deeply I still long, sometimes ! But I open my eyes, force myself to stare reality in the face, whenever her image comes behind closed lids, driving her from me—— And to end my confession. At the beginning, Diego, there seemed in thy voice and manner something of *her* ; I saw her sometimes in thee, as children see the elves they fear and hope for in stains on walls and flickers on the path. And all thy wondrous power, thy miraculous cure—— nay, forgive what seems ingratitude——was due, Diego, to my sick fancy making me see glances of her in thy eyes and hear her voice in thine. Not music but love, love's delusion, was what worked my cure.

DIEGO. Do you speak truly, Master ? Was it so ? And now ?

DUKE. Now, dear lad, I am cured——completely ; I know bushes from ghosts ; and I know thee, dearest friend, to be Diego.

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DIEGO. When these imaginations still held you, my Lord, did it ever happen that you wondered : what if the bush had been a ghost ; if Diego had turned into—what was she called ?——

DUKE. Magdalen. My fancy never went so far, good Diego. There was a grain of reason left. But if it had—— Well, I should have taken Magdalen's hand, and said, "Welcome, dear sister. This is a world of spells ; let us repeat some. Become henceforth my brother ; be the Duke of Mantua's best and truest friend ; turn into Diego, Magdalen."

*The DUKE presses DIEGO's arm, and, letting it go, walks away into the moonlight with an enigmatic air. A long pause.*

Hark, they are singing within ; the idle pages making songs to their ladies' eyebrows. Shall we go and listen ?

*(They walk in the direction of the palace.)*  
And *(with a little hesitation)* that makes me say, Diego, before we close this past of mine, and bury it for ever in our silence, that there is a little Moorish song, plaintive and quaint,



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she used to sing, which some day I will write down, and thou shalt sing it to me—on my deathbed.

DIEGO. Why not before? Speaking of songs, that mandolin, though out of tune, and vilely played, has got hold of a ditty I like well enough. Hark, the words are Tuscan, well known in the mountains. (*Sings.*)

I'd like to die, but die a little death only;

I'd like to die, but look down from the window;

I'd like to die, but stand upon the doorstep;

I'd like to die, but follow the procession;

I'd like to die, but see who smiles and weepeth;

I'd like to die, but die a little death only.

*(While DIEGO sings very loud, the mandolin inside the palace thrums faster and faster. As he ends, with a long defiant leap into a high note, a burst of applause from the palace.)*

DIEGO (*clapping his hands*). Well sung, Diego!

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### ACT IV

*A few weeks later. The new music-room in the Palace of Mantua. Windows on both sides admitting a view of the lake, so that the hall looks like a gallery surrounded by water. Outside, morning: the lake, the sky, and the lines of poplars on the banks, are all made of various textures of luminous blue. From the gardens below bay-trees raise their flowering branches against the windows. In every window an antique statue: the Mantuan Muse, the Mantuan Apollo, &c. In the walls between the windows are framed panels representing allegorical triumphs: those nearest the spectator are the triumphs of Chastity and of Fortitude. At the end of the room, steps and a balustrade, with a harpsichord and double-basses on a dais. The roof of the room is blue and gold; a deep blue ground, constellated with a gold labyrinth in relief. Round the cornice, blue and gold also, the inscription: "RECTAS PETO,"*

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*and the name, Ferdinandus Mantuae Dux.*

*The PRINCESS HIPPOLYTA of Mirandola, cousin to the DUKE ; and DIEGO. HIPPOLYTA is very young, but with the strength and grace, and the candour, rather of a beautiful boy than a woman. She is dazzlingly fair ; and her hair, arranged in waves like an antique amazon's, is stiff and lustrous, as if made of threads of gold. The brows are wide and straight, like a man's ; the glance fearless, but virginal and almost childlike. HIPPOLYTA is dressed in black and gold, parti-coloured, like Mantegna's Duchess. An old man, in scholar's gown, the Princess's Greek Tutor, has just introduced DIEGO and retired.*

DIEGO. The Duke your cousin's greeting and service, illustrious damsel. His Highness bids me ask how you are rested after your journey hither.

PRINCESS. Tell my cousin, good Signor Diego, that I am touched at his concern for me. And tell him, such is the virtuous air of his abode, that a whole night's rest sufficed to right me from the fatigue of two hours'

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journey in a litter; for I am new to that exercise, being accustomed to follow my poor father's hounds and falcons only on horseback. You shall thank the Duke my cousin for his civility. (*PRINCESS laughs.*)

DIEGO (*bowing, and keeping his eyes on the PRINCESS as he speaks*). His Highness wished to make his fair cousin smile. He has told me often how your illustrious father, the late Lord of Mirandola, brought his only daughter up in such a wise as scarcely to lack a son, with manly disciplines of mind and body; and that he named you fittingly after Hippolyta, who was Queen of the Amazons, virgins unlike their vain and weakly sex.

PRINCESS. She was; and wife of Theseus. But it seems that the poets care but little for the like of her; they tell us nothing of her, compared with her poor predecessor, Cretan Ariadne, she who had given Theseus the clue of the labyrinth. Methinks that maze must have been mazier than this blue and gold one overhead. What say you, Signor Diego?

DIEGO (*who has started slightly*). Ariadne? Was she the predecessor of Hippolyta? I did not know it. I am but a poor scholar,

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madam ; knowing the names and stories of gods and heroes only from songs and masques. The Duke should have selected some fitter messenger to hold converse with his fair learned cousin.

PRINCESS (*gravely*). Speak not like that, Signor Diego. You may not be a scholar, as you say ; but surely you are a philosopher. Nay, conceive my meaning : the fame of your virtuous equanimity has spread further than from this city to my small dominions. Your precocious wisdom—for you seem younger than I, and youths do not delight in being very wise—your moderation in the use of sudden greatness, your magnanimous treatment of enemies and detractors ; and the manner in which, disdainful of all personal advantage, you have surrounded the Duke my cousin with wisest counsellors and men expert in office——such are the results men seek from the study of philosophy.

DIEGO (*at first astonished, then amused, a little sadly*). You are mistaken, noble maiden. 'Tis not philosophy to refrain from things that do not tempt one. Riches or power are useless to me. As for the rest, you are mistaken



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also. The Duke is wise and valiant, and chooses therefore wise and valiant counsellors.

PRINCESS (*impetuously*). You are eloquent, Signor Diego, even as you are wise! But your words do not deceive me. Ambition lurks in every one; and power intoxicates all save those who have schooled themselves to use it as a means to virtue.

DIEGO. The thought had never struck me; but men have told me what you tell me now.

PRINCESS. Even Antiquity, which surpasses us so vastly in all manner of wisdom and heroism, can boast of very few like you. The noblest souls have grown tyrannical and rapacious and foolhardy in sudden elevation. Remember Alcibiades, the beloved pupil of the wisest of all mortals. Signor Diego, you may have read but little; but you have meditated to much profit, and must have wrestled like some great athlete with all that baser self which the divine Plato has told us how to master.

DIEGO (*shaking his head*). Alas, madam, your words make me ashamed, and yet they make me smile, being so far of the mark! I have wrestled with nothing; followed only my soul's blind impulses.

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PRINCESS (*gravely*). It must be, then, dear Signor Diego, as the Pythagoreans held : the discipline of music is virtuous for the soul. There is a power in numbered and measured sound very akin to wisdom ; mysterious and excellent ; as indeed the Ancients fabled in the tales of Orpheus and Amphion, musicians and great sages and legislators of states. I have long desired your conversation, admirable Diego.

DIEGO (*with secret contempt*). Noble maiden, such words exceed my poor unscholarly appreciation. The antique worthies whom you name are for me merely figures in tapestries and frescoes, quaint greybeards in laurel wreaths and helmets ; and I can scarcely tell whether the Ladies Fortitude and Rhetoric, with whom they hold converse, are real daughters of kings, or mere Arts and Virtues. But the Duke, a learned and judicious prince, will set due store by his youthful cousin's learning. As for me, simpleton and ignoramus that I am, all I see is that Princess Hippolyta is very beautiful and very young.

PRINCESS (*sighing a little, but with great simplicity*). I know it. I am young, and

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perhaps crude ; although I study hard to learn the rules of wisdom. You, Diego, seem to know them without study.

DIEGO. I know somewhat of the world and of men, gracious Princess, but that can scarce be called knowing wisdom. Say rather knowing blindness, envy, cruelty, endless nameless folly in others and oneself. But why should you seek to be wise ? you who are fair, young, a princess, and betrothed from your cradle to a great prince ? Be beautiful, be young, be what you are, a woman.

*DIEGO has said this last word with emphasis, but the PRINCESS has not noticed the sarcasm in his voice.*

PRINCESS (*shaking her head*). That is not my lot. I was destined, as you said, to be the wife of a great prince ; and my dear father trained me to fill that office.

DIEGO. Well, and to be beautiful, young, radiant ; to be a woman ; is not that the office of a wife ?

PRINCESS. I have not much experience. But my father told me, and I have gathered from books, that in the wives of princes such gifts are often thrown away ; that other

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women, supplying them, seem to supply them better. Look at my cousin's mother. I can remember her still beautiful, young, and most tenderly loving. Yet the Duke, my uncle, disdained her, and all she got was loneliness and heartbreak. An honourable woman, a princess, cannot compete with those who study to please and to please only. She must either submit to being ousted from her husband's love, or soar above it into other regions.

DIEGO (*interested*). Other regions ?

PRINCESS. Higher ones. She must be fit to be her husband's help, and to nurse his sons to valour and wisdom.

DIEGO. I see. The Prince must know that, besides all the knights that he summons to battle, and all the wise men whom he hears in council, there is another knight, in rather lighter armour and quicker tired, another counsellor, less experienced and of less steady temper, ready for use. Is this great gain ?

PRINCESS. It is strange that, being a man, you should conceive of women from——

DIEGO. From a man's standpoint ?

PRINCESS. Nay ; methinks a woman's. For I observe that women, when they wish to help

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men, think first of all of some transparent masquerade, donning men's clothes, at all events in metaphor, in order to be near their lovers when not wanted.

DIEGO (*hastily*). Donning men's clothes ? A masquerade ? I fail to follow your meaning, gracious maiden.

PRINCESS (*simply*). So I have learned at least from our poets. Angelica, and Bradamante and Fiordispina, scouring the country after their lovers, who were busy enough without them. I prefer Penelope, staying at home to save the lands and goods of Ulysses, and bringing up his son to rescue and avenge him.

DIEGO (*reassured and indifferent*). Did Ulysses love Penelope any better for it, madam ? better than poor besotted Menelaus, after all his injuries, loved Helen back in Sparta ?

PRINCESS. That is not the question. A woman born to be a prince's wife and prince's mother, does her work not for the sake of something greater than love, whether much or little.

DIEGO. For what, then ?



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PRINCESS. Does a well-bred horse or excellent falcon do its duty to please its master ? No ; but because such is its nature. Similarly, methinks, a woman bred to be a princess works with her husband, for her husband, not for any reward, but because he and she are of the same breed, and obey the same instincts.

DIEGO. Ah !—— Then happiness, love,—all that a woman craves for ?

PRINCESS. Are accidents. Are they not so in the life of a prince ? Love he may snatch ; and she, being in woman's fashion not allowed to snatch, may receive as a gift, or not. But received or snatched, it is not either's business ; not their nature's true fulfilment.

DIEGO. You think so, Lady ?

PRINCESS. I am bound to think so. I was born to it and taught it. You know the Duke, my cousin—well, I am his bride, not being born his sister.

DIEGO. And you are satisfied ? O beautiful Princess, you are of illustrious lineage and mind, and learned. Your father brought you up on Plutarch instead of Amadis ; you know many things, but there is one, me-

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thinks, no one can know the nature of until he has it.

PRINCESS. What is that, pray ?

DIEGO. A heart. Because you have not got one yet, you make your plans without it—a negligible item in your life.

PRINCESS. I am not a child.

DIEGO. But not yet a woman.

PRINCESS (*meditatively*). You think then——

DIEGO. I do not *think* ; I *know*. And *you* will know, some day. And then——

PRINCESS. Then I shall suffer. Why, we must all suffer. Say that, having a heart, a heart for husband or child, means certain grief—well, does not riding, walking down your stairs, mean the chance of broken bones ? Does not living mean old age, disease, possible blindness or paralysis, and quite inevitable aches ? If, as you say, I must needs grow a heart, and if a heart must needs give agony, why, I shall live through heartbreak as through pain in any other limb.

DIEGO. Yes—were your heart a limb like all the rest—but 'tis the very centre and fountain of all life.

PRINCESS. You think so ? 'Tis, methinks,

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pushing analogy too far, and metaphor. This necessary organ, diffusing life throughout us, and, as physicians say, removing with its vigorous floods all that has ceased to live, replacing it with new and living tissue—this great literal heart cannot be the seat of only one small passion.

DIEGO. Yet I have known more women than one die of that small passion's frustrating.

PRINCESS. But you have known also, I reckon, many a man in whom life, what he had to live for, was stronger than all love. They say the Duke my cousin's melancholy sickness was due to love which he had outlived.

DIEGO. They say so, madam.

PRINCESS (*thoughtfully*). I think it possible, from what I know of him. He was much with my father when a lad; and I, a child, would listen to their converse, not understanding its items, but seeming to understand the general drift. My father often said my cousin was romantic, favoured overmuch his tender mother, and would suffer greatly, learning to live for valour and for wisdom.

DIEGO. Think you he has, madam?

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PRINCESS. If 'tis true that occasion has already come.

DIEGO. And—if that occasion came, for the first time or for the second, perhaps, after your marriage? What would you do, madam?

PRINCESS. I cannot tell as yet. Help him, I trust, when help could come, by the sympathy of a soul's strength and serenity. Stand aside, most likely, waiting to be wanted. Or else——

DIEGO. Or else, illustrious maiden?

PRINCESS. Or else——I know not——perhaps, growing a heart, get some use from it.

DIEGO. Your Highness surely does not mean use it to love with?

PRINCESS. Why not? It might be one way of help. And if I saw him struggling with grief, seeking to live the life and think the thought fit for his station; why, methinks I could love him. He seems lovable. Only love could have taught fidelity like yours.

DIEGO. You forget, gracious Princess, that you attributed great power of virtue to a habit of conduct, which is like the nature of

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high-bred horses, needing no spur. But in truth you are right. I am no high-bred creature. Quite the contrary. Like curs, I love ; love, and only love. For curs are known to love their masters.

PRINCESS. Speak not thus, virtuous Diego. I have indeed talked in magnanimous fashion, and believed, sincerely, that I felt high resolves. But you have acted, lived, and done magnanimously. What you have been and are to the Duke is better schooling for me than all the Lives of Plutarch.

DIEGO. You could not learn from me, lady.

PRINCESS. But I would try, Diego.

DIEGO. Be not grasping, madam. The generous coursers whom your father taught you to break and harness have their set of virtues. Those of curs are different. Do not grudge them those. Your noble horses kick them enough, without even seeing their presence. But I feel I am beyond my depth, not being philosophical by nature or schooling. And I had forgotten to give you part of his Highness's message. Knowing your love of music, and the attention you have given it,



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the Duke imagined it might divert you, till he was at leisure to pay you homage, to make trial of my poor powers. Will it please you to order the other musicians, madam ?

PRINCESS. Nay, good Diego, humour me in this. I have studied music, and would fain make trial of accompanying your voice. Have you notes by you ?

DIEGO. Here are some, madam, left for the use of his Highness's band this evening. Here is the pastoral of Phyllis by Ludovic of the Lute ; a hymn in four parts to the Virgin by Orlandus Lassus ; a madrigal by the Pope's master, Signor Pierluigi of Praeneste. Ah ! Here is a dramatic scene between Medea and Creusa, rivals in love, by the Florentine Octavio. Have you knowledge of it, madam ?

PRINCESS. I have sung it with my master for exercise. But, good Diego, find a song for yourself.

DIEGO. You shall humour me now, gracious lady. Think I am your master. I desire to hear your voice. And who knows ? In this small matter I may really teach you something.

*The PRINCESS sits to the harpsichord,*

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DIEGO *standing beside her on the daïs. They sing, the PRINCESS taking the treble, DIEGO the contralto part. The PRINCESS enters first with a full-toned voice, clear and high, singing very carefully. DIEGO follows, singing in a whisper. His voice is a little husky, and here and there broken, but ineffably delicious and penetrating, and, as he sings, becomes, without quitting the whisper, dominating and disquieting. The PRINCESS plays a wrong chord, and breaks off suddenly.*

DIEGO (*having finished a cadence, rudely*).  
What is it, madam ?

PRINCESS. I know not. I have lost my place—I—I feel bewildered. When your voice rose up against mine, Diego, I lost my head. And—I do not know how to express it—when our voices met in that held dissonance, it seemed as if you hurt me—horribly.

DIEGO (*smiling, with hypocritical apology*).  
Forgive me, madam. I sang too loud, perhaps. We theatre singers are apt to strain things. I trust some day to hear you sing alone. You have a lovely voice : more like a boy's than like a maiden's still.

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PRINCESS. And yours——'tis strange that at your age we should reverse the parts—yours, though deeper than mine, is like a woman's.

DIEGO (*laughing*). I have grown a heart, madam ; 'tis an organ grows quicker where the breed is mixed and lowly, no nobler limbs retarding its development by theirs.

PRINCESS. Speak not thus, excellent Diego. Why cause me pain by disrespectful treatment of a person—your own admirable self—whom I respect ? You have experience, Diego, and shall teach me many things, for I desire learning.

*The PRINCESS takes his hand in both hers, very kindly and simply. DIEGO, disengaging his, bows very ceremoniously.*

DIEGO. Shall I teach you to sing as I do, gracious madam ?

PRINCESS (*after a moment*). I think not, Diego.

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### ACT V

*Two months later. The wedding day of the DUKE.*

*Another part of the palace of Mantua. A long terrace still to be seen, with roof supported by columns. It looks on one side on to the jousting-ground, a green meadow surrounded by clipped hedges and set all round with mulberry-trees. On the other side it overlooks the lake, against which, as a fact, it acts as dyke. The Court of Mantua and Envoys of foreign Princes, together with many Prelates, are assembled on the terrace, surrounding the seats of the DUKE, the young DUCHESS HIPPOLYTA, the DUCHESS DOWAGER, and the CARDINAL. Facing this gallery, and separated from it by a line of sedge and willows, and a few yards of pure green water, starred with white lilies, is a stage in the shape of a Grecian temple, apparently rising out of the lake. Its pediment and columns are slung with garlands of bay and cypress. In the gable, the DUKE's device*

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*of a labyrinth in gold on a blue ground and the motto "RECTAS PETO." On the stage, but this side of the curtain, which is down, are a number of Musicians with violins, viols, theorbos, a hautboy, a flute, a bassoon, viola d'amore and bass viols, grouped round two men with double-basses and a man at a harpsichord, in dress like the musicians in Veronese's paintings. They are preluding gently, playing elaborately fugued variations on a dance tune in three-eight time, rendered singularly plaintive by the absence of perfect closes.*

CARDINAL (*to VENETIAN AMBASSADOR*). What say you to our Diego's masque, my Lord? Does not his skill as a composer vie almost with his subtlety as a singer?

MARCHIONESS OF GUASTALLA (*to the DUCHESS DOWAGER*). A most excellent masque, methinks, madam. And of so new a kind. We have had masques in palaces and also in gardens, and some, I own it, beautiful; for our palace on the hill affords fine vistas of cypress avenues and the distant plain. But, until the Duke your son, no one has had a



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masque on the water, it would seem. 'Tis doubtless his invention ?

DUCHESS (*with evident preoccupation*). I think not, madam. 'Tis our foolish Diego's freak. And I confess I like it not. It makes me anxious for the players.

BISHOP OF CREMONA (*to the CARDINAL*). A wondrous singer, your Signor Diego. They say the Spaniards have subtle exercises for keeping the voice thus youthful. His Holiness has several such who sing divinely under Pier-luigi's guidance. But your Diego seems really but a child, yet has a mode of singing like one who knows a world of joys and sorrows.

CARDINAL. He has. Indeed, I sometimes think he pushes the pathetic quality too far. I am all for the Olympic serenity of the wise ancients.

YOUNG DUCHESS (*laughing*). My uncle would, I almost think, exile our divine Diego, as Plato did the poets, for moving us too much.

PRINCE OF MASSA (*whispering*). He hath moved your noble husband strangely. Or is it, gracious bride, that too much happiness overwhelms our friend ?

YOUNG DUCHESS (*turning round and noticing*

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*the Duke, a few seats off*). 'Tis true. Ferdinand is very sensitive to music, and is greatly concerned for our Diego's play. Still—I wonder——

MARCHIONESS (*to the DUKE OF FERRARA's POET, who is standing near her*). I really never could have recognised Signor Diego in his disguise. He looks for all the world exactly like a woman.

POET. A woman! Say a goddess, madam! Upon my soul (*whispering*), the bride is scarce as beautiful as he, although as fair as one of the noble swans who sail on those clear waters.

JESTER. After the play we shall see admiring dames trooping behind the scenes to learn the secret of the paints which can change a scrubby boy into a beauteous nymph; a metamorphosis worth twenty of Sir Ovid's.

DOGE'S WIFE (*to the DUKE*). They all tell me—but 'tis a secret naturally—that the words of this ingenious masque are from your highness's own pen, and that you helped—such are your varied gifts—your singing page to set them to music.

DUKE (*impatiently*). It may be that your Serenity is rightly informed, or not.

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KNIGHT OF MALTA (*to YOUNG DUCHESS*). One recognises, at least, the mark of Duke Ferdinand's genius in the suiting of the play to the surroundings. Given these lakes, what fitter argument than Ariadne abandoned on her little island? And the labyrinth in the story is a pretty allusion to your lord's personal device and the magnificent ceiling he lately designed for our admiration.

YOUNG DUCHESS (*with her eyes fixed on the curtain, which begins to move*). Nay, 'tis all Diego's thought. Hush, they begin to play. Oh, my heart beats with curiosity to know how our dear Diego will carry his invention through, and to hear the last song which he has never let me hear him sing.

*The curtain is drawn aside, displaying the stage, set with orange- and myrtle-trees in jars, and a big flowering oleander. There is no painted background, but instead the lake, with distant shore, and the sky with the sun slowly descending into clouds, which light up purple and crimson, and send rosy streamers into the high blue air. On the stage a rout of Bacchanals, dressed like Mantegna's*

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*Hours, but with vine-garlands ; also Satyrs quaintly dressed in goatskins, but with top-knots of ribbons, all singing a Latin ode in praise of Bacchus and wine ; while girls dressed as Nymphs, with ribboned thyrsi in their hands, dance a pavana before a throne of moss overhung by ribboned garlands. On this throne are seated a Tenor as Bacchus, dressed in russet and leopard skins, a garland of vine leaves round his waist and round his wide-brimmed hat ; and DIEGO, as ARIADNE. DIEGO, no longer habited as a man, but in woman's garments, like those of Guercino's Sibyls : a floating robe and vest of orange and violet, open at the throat ; with parti-coloured scarves hanging, and a parti-coloured scarf wound like a turban round the head, the locks of dark hair escaping from beneath. She is extremely beautiful.*

MAGDALEN (sometime known as DIEGO, now representing ARIADNE) rises from the throne and speaks, turning to BACCHUS. Her voice is a contralto, but not deep, and with upper notes like a hautboy's.

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*She speaks in an irregular recitative, sustained by chords on the viols and harpsichord.*

ARIADNE. Tempt me not, gentle Bacchus, sunburnt god of ruddy vines and rustic revelry. The gifts you bring, the queenship of the world of wine-inspired fancies, cannot quell my grief at Theseus' loss.

BACCHUS (*tenor*). Princess, I do beseech you, give me leave to try and sooth your anguish. Daughter of Cretan Minos, stern Judge of the Departed, your rearing has been too sad for youth and beauty, and the shade of Orcus has ever lain across your path. But I am God of Gladness; I can take your soul, suspend it in Mirth's sun, even as the grapes, translucent amber or rosy, hang from the tendril in the ripening sun of the crisp autumn day. I can unwind your soul, and string it in the serene sky of evening, smiling in the deep blue like to the stars, encircled, I offer you as crown. Listen, fair nymph: 'tis a god woos you.

ARIADNE. Alas, radiant Divinity of a time of year gentler than Spring and fruitfuller than Summer, there is no Autumn for hapless



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ARIADNE. Only winter's nights and frosts wrap my soul. When Theseus went, my youth went also. I pray you leave me to my poor tears and the thoughts of him.

BACCHUS. Lady, even a God, and even a lover, must respect your grief. Farewell. Comrades, along; the pine-trees on the hills, the ivy-wreaths upon the rocks, await your company; and the red-stained vat, the heady-scented oak-wood, demand your presence.

*The Bacchantes and Satyrs sing a Latin ode in praise of Wine, in four parts, with accompaniment of bass viols and lutes, and exeunt with Bacchus.*

YOUNG DUCHESS (to DUKE OF FERRARA'S POET). Now, now, Master Torquato, now we shall hear Poetry's own self sing with our Diego's voice.

DIEGO, *as ARIADNE, walks slowly up and down the stage, while the viola plays a prelude in the minor. Then she speaks, recitative with chords only by strings and harpsichord.*

ARIADNE. They are gone at last. Kind creatures, how their kindness fretted my weary soul! To be alone with grief is almost

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pleasure, since grief means thought of Theseus. Yet that thought is killing me. O Theseus, why didst thou ever come into my life? Why did not the cruel Minotaur gore and trample thee like all the others? Hapless Ariadne! The clue was in my keeping, and I reached it to him. And now his ship has long since neared his native shores, and he stands on the prow, watching for his new love. But the Past belongs to me.

*A flute rises in the orchestra, with viols accompanying, pizzicati, and plays three or four bars of intricate mazy passages, very sweet and poignant, stopping on a high note, with imperfect close.*

ARIADNE (*continuing*). And in the past he loved me, and he loves me still. Nothing can alter that. Nay, Theseus, thou canst never, never love another like me.

*Arioso. The declamation becomes more melodic, though still unrhythmical, and is accompanied by a rapid and passionate tremolo of violins and viols.*

And thy love for her will be but the thin ghost of the reality that lived for me. But Theseus—— Do not leave me yet. Another

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hour, another minute. I have so much to tell thee, dearest, ere thou goest.

*Accompaniment more and more agitated.*

*A hautboy echoes ARIADNE's last phrase with poignant reedy tone.*

Thou knowest, I have not yet sung thee that little song thou lovest to hear of evenings; the little song made by the Æolian poetess whom Apollo loved when in her teens. And thou canst not go away till I have sung it. See! my lute. But I must tune it. All is out of tune in my poor jangled life.

*Lute solo in the orchestra. A Siciliana or slow dance, very delicate and simple.*  
*ARIADNE sings.*

### SONG.

Let us forget we loved each other much;  
Let us forget we ever have to part;  
Let us forget that any look or touch  
Once let in either to the other's heart.

Only we'll sit upon the daisied grass,  
And hear the larks and see the swallows  
pass;

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Only we'll live awhile, as children play,  
Without to-morrow, without yesterday.

*During the ritornello, between the two  
verses,*

POET (*to the YOUNG DUCHESS, whispering*).  
Madam, methinks his Highness is unwell.  
Turn round, I pray you.

YOUNG DUCHESS (*without turning*). He feels  
the play's charm. Hush.

DUCHESS DOWAGER (*whispering*). Come,  
Ferdinand, you are faint. Come with me.

DUKE (*whispering*). Nay, mother. It will  
pass. Only a certain oppression at the heart,  
I was once subject to. Let us be still.

SONG (*repeats*).

Only we'll live awhile, as children play,  
Without to-morrow, without yesterday.

*A few bars of ritornello after the song.*

DUCHESS DOWAGER (*whispering*). Courage,  
my son; I know all.

ARIADNE (*recitative with accompaniment of  
violins, flute, and harp*). Theseus, I've sung my

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song. Alas, alas for our poor songs we sing to the beloved, and vainly try to vary into newness !

*A few notes of the harp well up, slow and liquid.*

Now I can go to rest, and darkness lap my weary heart. Theseus, my love, good night !

*Violins tremolo. The hautboy suddenly enters with a long wailing phrase. ARIADNE quickly mounts on to the back of the stage, turns round for one second, waving a kiss to an imaginary person, and then flings herself down into the lake.*

*A great burst of applause. Enter immediately, and during the cries and clapping, a chorus of Water-Nymphs in transparent veils and garlands of willows and lilies, which sings to a solemn counterpoint, the dirge of ARIADNE. But their singing is barely audible through the applause of the whole Court and the shouts of "DIEGO ! DIEGO ! ARIADNE ! ARIADNE !" The young DUCHESS rises excitedly, wiping her eyes.*



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YOUNG DUCHESS. Dear friend! Diego!  
Diego! Our Orpheus, come forth.

CROWD. Diego! Diego!

POET (*to the POPE'S LEGATE*). He is a real artist, and scorns to spoil the play's impression by truckling to this foolish habit of applause.

MARCHIONESS. Still, a mere singer, a page—when his betters call—— But see! the Duke has left our midst.

CARDINAL. He has gone to bring back Diego in triumph, doubtless.

VENETIAN AMBASSADOR. And, I note, his venerable mother has also left us. I doubt whether this play has not offended her strict widow's austerity.

YOUNG DUCHESS. But where is Diego, meanwhile?

*The Chorus and orchestra continue the dirge for ARIADNE. A Gentleman-in-waiting elbows through the crowd to the*  
CARDINAL.

GENTLEMAN (*whispering*). Most Eminent, a word——

CARDINAL (*whispering*). The Duke has had a return of his malady?

GENTLEMAN (*whispering*). No, most

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Eminent. But Diego is nowhere to be found. And they have brought up behind the stage the body of a woman in Ariadne's weeds.

CARDINAL (*whispering*). Ah, is that all? Discretion, pray. I knew it. But 'tis a most distressing accident. Discretion above all.

*The Chorus suddenly breaks off. For on to the stage comes the DUKE. He is dripping, and bears in his arms the dead body, drowned, of DIEGO, in the garb of ARIADNE. A shout from the crowd.*

YOUNG DUCHESS (*with a cry, clutching the POET's arm*). Diego!

DUKE (*stooping over the body, which he has laid upon the stage, and speaking very low*).  
Magdalen!

*(The curtain is hastily closed.)*

THE END







## THE WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE



It has long been a reproach to England that only one volume by ANATOLE FRANCE has been adequately rendered into English; yet outside this country he shares with TOLSTOI the distinction of being the greatest and most daring student of humanity now living.

¶ There have been many difficulties to encounter in completing arrangements for a uniform edition, though perhaps the chief barrier to publication here has been the fact that his writings are not for babes—but for men and the mothers of men. Indeed, some of his Eastern romances are written with biblical candour. “I have sought truth strenuously,” he tells us, “I have met her boldly. I have never turned from her even when she wore an

## THE WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE

unexpected aspect." Still, it is believed that the day has come for giving English versions of all his imaginative works, and of his monumental study JOAN OF ARC, which is undoubtedly the most discussed book in the world of letters to-day.

¶ MR. JOHN LANE has pleasure in announcing that he will commence publication of the works of M. ANATOLE FRANCE in English, under the general editorship of MR. FREDERIC CHAPMAN, with the following volumes :

THE RED LILY

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¶ All the books will be published at 6/- each with the exception of JOAN OF ARC, which will be 25/- net the two volumes, with eight Illustrations.

¶ The format of the volumes leaves little to be desired. The size is Demy 8vo ( $9 \times 5\frac{3}{4}$  in.), that of this Prospectus, and they will be printed from Caslon type upon a paper light in weight and strong in texture, with a cover design in crimson and gold, a gilt top, end-papers from designs by Aubrey Beardsley and initials by Henry Osipov. In short, these are volumes for the bibliophile as well as the lover of fiction, and form perhaps the cheapest library edition of copyright novels ever published, for the price is only that of an ordinary novel.

¶ The translation of these books has been entrusted to such competent French scholars as MR. ALFRED ALLINSON, HON. MAURICE BARING, MR. FREDERIC CHAPMAN, MR.



## THE WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE

ROBERT B. DOUGLAS, MR. A. W. EVANS, MRS. FARLEY, MRS. JOHN LANE, MRS. NEWMARCH, MR. C. E. ROCHE, MISS WINIFRED STEPHENS, and MISS M. P. WILLCOCKS.

¶ As Anatole Thibault, *dit* Anatole France, is to most English readers merely a name, it will be well to state that he was born in 1844 in the picturesque and inspiring surroundings of an old bookshop on the Quai Voltaire, Paris, kept by his father, Monsieur Thibault, an authority on eighteenth-century history, from whom the boy caught the passion for the principles of the Revolution, while from his mother he was learning to love the ascetic ideals chronicled in the Lives of the Saints. He was schooled with the lovers of old books, missals and manuscripts; he matriculated on the Quais with the old Jewish dealers of curios and *objets d'art*; he graduated in the great university of life and experience. It will be recognised that all his work is permeated by his youthful impressions; he is, in fact, a virtuoso at large.

¶ He has written about thirty volumes of fiction. His first novel was *JOCASTA & THE FAMISHED CAT* (1879). *THE CRIME OF SYLVESTRE BONNARD* appeared in 1881, and had the distinction of being crowned by the French Academy, into which he was received in 1896.

¶ His work is illuminated with style, scholarship, and psychology; but its outstanding features are the lambent wit, the gay mockery, the genial irony with which he touches every subject he treats. But the wit is never malicious, the mockery never derisive, the irony never barbed. To quote from his own *GARDEN OF EPICURUS*: "Irony and Pity are both of good counsel; the first with her smiles makes life agreeable, the other sanctifies it to us with her tears. The Irony I invoke is no cruel deity. She mocks neither love nor beauty. She is gentle and kindly disposed. Her mirth disarms anger and it is she teaches us to laugh at rogues and fools whom but for her we might be so weak as to hate."

¶ Often he shows how divine humanity triumphs over mere ascetism, and with entire reverence; indeed, he might be described as an ascetic overflowing with humanity, just as he has been termed a "pagan, but a pagan constantly haunted by the pre-occupation of Christ." He is in turn—like his own Choulette in *THE RED LILY*—saintly and Rabelaisian, yet without incongruity.

## THE WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE

At all times he is the unrelenting foe of superstition and hypocrisy. Of himself he once modestly said: "You will find in my writings perfect sincerity (lying demands a talent I do not possess), much indulgence, and some natural affection for the beautiful and good."

¶ The mere extent of an author's popularity is perhaps a poor argument, yet it is significant that two books by this author are in their HUNDRED AND TENTH THOUSAND, and numbers of them well into their SEVENTIETH THOUSAND, whilst the one which a Frenchman recently described as "Monsieur France's most arid book" is in its FIFTY-EIGHTH THOUSAND.

¶ Inasmuch as M. FRANCE'S ONLY contribution to an English periodical appeared in THE YELLOW BOOK, vol. v., April 1895, together with the first important English appreciation of his work from the pen of the Hon. Maurice Baring, it is peculiarly appropriate that the English edition of his works should be issued from the Bodley Head.

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